

# Baldwin Business

## ANNUAL REPORT

# 2020



## Economic Development

### Baldwin's economy bounces back after rough start to 2020

By **JOHN UNDERWOOD**  
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**FAIRHOPE** — Baldwin County's economy ended 2020 on a good note following a rough start due to shutdowns caused by COVID-19.

"When everything kind of hit in March, it was projected that Baldwin County could be the seventh most impacted metro area in the country," said Tanner Jones, research analyst with the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance. "That was due in large part because our economy is so dependent on tourism and pretty much everything had shut down."

By April, that projection looked to be coming true with unemployment rates skyrocketing to more than 20 percent.

According to the EDA Year in Review, more than 26,000 Baldwin County residents filed new unemployment claims from March 14 to May 30, 2020. That is equivalent to 27% of Baldwin's total workforce.

But, Jones said, things bounced back quickly when beaches, businesses and restaurants were able to open. By the end of the year, unemployment figures had gone

back down to 5.5% and by the end of February 2021, had stabilized at around 4 percent, Jones said.

"I think it really speaks to our continuing diversity economically," Jones said. "While we're still largely dependent on tourism, we've continued with steady growth in other areas."

Infrastructure has played a large part in that success, with large economic growth along with Interstate 10 and Interstate 65 corridors.

One of the biggest success stories in 2020 and on into 2021 was the announcement in July that leading grocery retailer ALDI U.S. announced plans to construct a new regional corporate headquarters and distribution center in Loxley's industrial and warehousing district, north of I-10.

The new 564,000 square-foot facility will bring approximately \$100 million in capital investment to Loxley and Baldwin County, creating 200 jobs.

During groundbreaking ceremonies for the facility in February, Dan Gavin, ALDI vice president of Real Estate, said this is the sixth distribution center to be built in the Southeast, the 26th in the United States. The



JOHN UNDERWOOD / STAFF PHOTO

**Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey joined local and state officials to break ground in February 2021 on the new ALDI warehouse in Loxley.**

facility is part of a five-year commitment from the retailer to add new stores throughout the United States, along with expanding and updating several existing stores across the U.S.

The company has also expanded its eCommerce offering curbside grocery pickup, now available at 700 stores, and delivery in more than 10,000 zip codes.

ALDI currently operates more than 180 stores in Alabama and Florida, with four regional headquarters and distribution centers in the area. Within Alabama, a majority of the ALDI stores are located north of Montgomery. The Loxley project is the retailer's first in Baldwin County.

Gavin said location played a large role in the decision to build the distribution center in Loxley, not only with its proximity to Interstate 10, which stretches from coast-to-coast, but also its proximity to Interstate 65 and its connection to many of ALDI's distribution centers in the north.

Beyond providing hundreds of local jobs to the area, the facility is a commitment to serve Loxley and the surrounding community, Gavin said.

ALDI currently operates 30 stores across the state of Alabama and, according to reports, the expansion will also include the building of seven new retail stores in the area, including stores in Foley, Spanish Fort, Daphne

#### Accolades

- The U.S. Census Bureau ranks Baldwin County as the 11th fastest-growing metropolitan area in the United States since 2010.
- Since 2010, Baldwin County ranks as Alabama's leader for incoming migration, with over 100 people moving to the county each week, according to PARCA.
- Seven Baldwin County companies earned a spot on the 2020 Inc. 5000 list.
- Area Development ranked Baldwin County as one of the Top 10 fastest-growing mid-size markets.
- The Bureau of Economic Analysis ranked Baldwin County as Alabama's leader for GDP growth, ranked 33rd in the U.S.
- Area Development recognized Baldwin County Public Schools as a leader in their forward-thinking approach to virtual learning.
- EMSI ranked Baldwin County as Alabama's leader for number of remote workers per capita prior to COVID-19.
- IBM ranked Alabama as the U.S. leader for job creation from foreign investment.
- Site Selection ranked Alabama's "business climate" seventh among all states.
- Alabama ranked sixth among Area Development's Top States for Doing Business.
- Alabama was ranked among Global Trade's top states for Site Selection Incentives.
- Business Facilities ranked Alabama among the top states for workforce development and business climate.

and Fairhope in Baldwin County.

The new Loxley facility will serve new ALDI stores in southern Alabama, Louisiana and throughout the Florida Panhandle.

In Loxley alone, Jones said, wages are up 142% as the economy continues to grow across the board.

And while plans to build an Amazon distri-

SEE **ECONOMY**, PAGE 3



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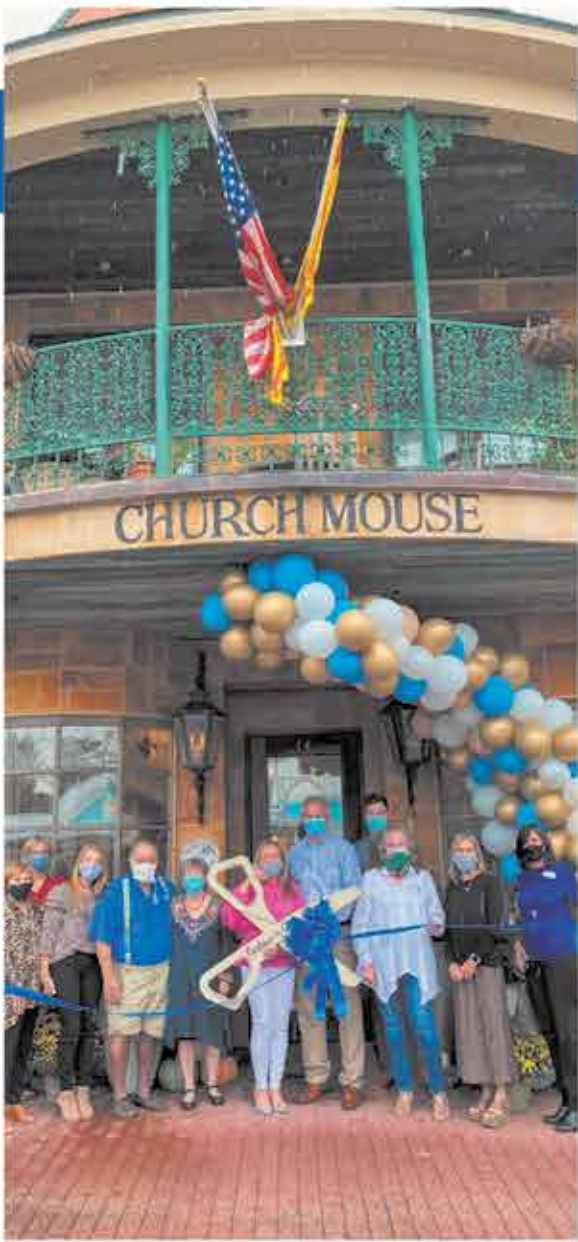
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# EASTERN SHORE

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

IT'S ALL IN WHO YOU KNOW AND WE'D LOVE TO INTRODUCE YOU

## WHO WE ARE

The Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce is a membership organization made up of local businesses in the cities of Daphne, Fairhope and Spanish Fort, Alabama. It's our mission to make the Eastern Shore the best place to live, work and cultivate business.

## WHAT WE DO

The Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce connects member businesses to the people, resources and tools they need to thrive.

## HOW WE DO IT

### PROMOTING BUSINESS

Providing value, opportunity, promotion, education, networking and recognition for members

### BUILDING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Informing, educating and providing access to elected officials and community leaders to ensure a business-friendly environment

### ADVANCING TOURISM

Promoting tourism as an economic driver through communication and education

### ADVOCATING FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Bridging relationships between businesses, education and training entities and the workforce

## HOW TO GET STARTED

1

Let's meet!  
We want to hear about the challenges your business faces.

2

We'll draw out a plan to get you connected.

3

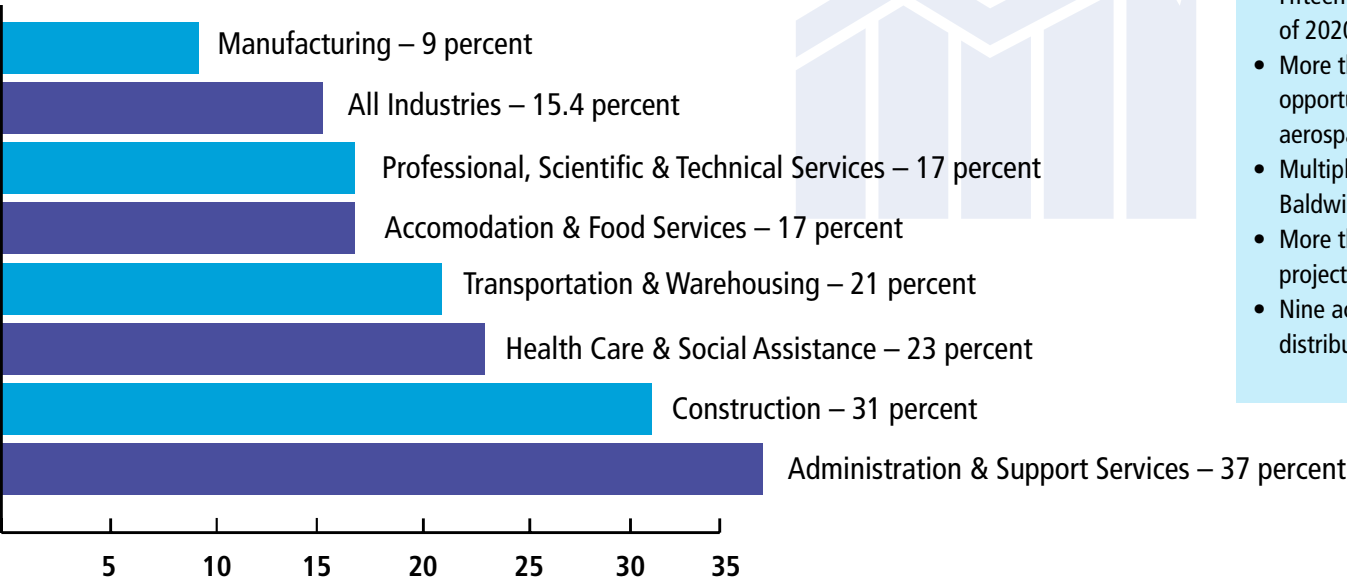
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5-year Baldwin County Job Growth

2015-2020



2020 Project Activity

- Fifteen new project opportunities in the final quarter of 2020.
- More than \$2 billion in new capital expenditure opportunities in advanced manufacturing and aerospace sectors.
- Multiple project opportunities for each region of Baldwin County.
- More than 7,000 new job opportunities from 2020 projects.
- Nine active projects in the warehousing and distribution sector at year-end.

ECONOMY

CONTINUED FROM 1

bution center along the I-10 corridor in Spanish Fort fell through in March, officials say the property remains a viable location to bring industry and jobs to the area. Along the I-65 corridor, Jones said, enhancements at the 3,000-acre South Alabama Mega Site in North Baldwin County are nearing completion and will provide a huge boost in attracting business and industry to the area.

The South Alabama Mega Site received \$7 million in site enhancements over the past year. The investment, made by Alabama Power and CSX Transportation, was used to create an on-site rail bed, grade 200 acres of site and create a 1-million-square-foot building pad on the site. “The Alliance continues to market the South Alabama Mega Site to manufacturers seeking a location for their next operation, and with these enhancements, the site truly stands in its own category for

speed-to-market and preparedness,” according to the EDA’s 2020 Year in Review. “Company representatives and site selection consultants on active projects throughout 2020 have remarked that the South Alabama Mega Site has re-defined what is typically viewed as a ‘shovel-ready’ property.” Founded in 1994 by Baldwin County private and public sector leaders at the recommendation of the Alabama Department of Commerce, the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance is a 501 (c) (6) private

nonprofit dedicated to growing and diversifying the county’s economy and providing opportunities for businesses to succeed. As a partnership of local public and private professionals, leaders and officials, the Alliance is funded and supported by the county government, 14 municipalities, five Chambers of Commerce, eight Industrial Development Boards and more than 100 privately-owned businesses. The Alliance is governed by a 19-member board of directors, con-

sisting of 15 private sector leaders appointed by the five Baldwin County Chambers of Commerce, two chamber presidents and two ex-officio members, including a rotating mayor and county commissioner each year. “The best news of all is our future continues to look even brighter, with our project pipeline filling up quickly at year-end,” said Baldwin County EDA President and CEO Lee Lawson in EDA’s Year in Review. “Baldwin County continues to be a magnet for business investment

across numerous industry sectors, and the Alliance, in partnership with our investors and elected leaders, continues to make major strides toward further diversifying our already strong economy.” While the economy is projected to completely bounce back by the end of 2021, Jones said, the process has really already begun. “Despite the challenges, we saw our economy grow in 2020 and I believe we will continue to see that growth in 2021 and beyond,” Jones said.



Mayor: Charles Murphy

Council:  
Sue Cooper, Joseph Kitchens, Ruthie Campbell  
Paul Hollingsworth, Russell Johnson

City Clerk: Shannon Burkett  
City Attorney: Ken Raines  
Chief Financial Officer: Ann Simpson  
Chief Of Police: Brad Kendrick  
Public Works Director: Scott Gilbert  
City Engineer: Greg Smith

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Tourism

# 2020: Another test of our coastal resilience

Contributed by  
**Herb MALONE,**  
**President & CEO;**  
**Beth GENDLER,**  
**Chief Operating Officer,**  
**Gulf Shores & Orange**  
**Beach Tourism**

Challenging times are nothing new to Alabama’s Gulf Coast. We are used to what Mother Nature brings with hurricane seasons, and we survived one of the worst man-made environmental disasters in United States history with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. But watching the entire country — and world — shut down for the COVID-19 pandemic was a test even the most diligent crisis planner could not fathom.

Our local economy is a tourism economy, and 2020 had started off with a really strong winter season. Then things turned very worrisome in March and April as suddenly we bottomed out to almost nothing. It was surreal that our destination bustling with spring break guests turned into relative ghost towns almost overnight — staying that way for six weeks in the heart of what is normally our ramp up for summer. But when our beaches reopened April 30 — the first in the Southeast

to do so — the visitors came, helping our economy get back to life and gave a sense of hope to our business owners and their employees.

As difficult as 2020 was with COVID and then Hurricane Sally hitting our area hard in September, this community was fortunate because Gulf Shores and Orange Beach fit the model for where people felt comfortable traveling — a destination accessible as a road trip, with lodging options comprised heavily of vacation rentals allowing people to safely stay in their own spaces and 32 miles of beach plus numerous outdoor and water activities allowing for social distancing from others. Because many other destinations were not open to visitors, cruise lines were not operating, and international travel was halted, we welcomed many guests discovering Alabama’s Gulf Coast for the first time.

**Overall impact of COVID on tourism**  
At Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism, three key indicators we track to gauge the success of a year are total taxable lodging rentals (the lodging tax collected on vacation rentals, hotels, campgrounds);

	HOTEL OCCUPANCY		
	2019	2020	
DEC	30.0%	33.3%	
JAN	33.7%	57.1%	
FEB	54.6%	56.4%	
WINTER	39.4%	48.9%	
Record-setting winter			
MAR	72.7%	37.4%	COVID shutdown COVID shutdown Beaches reopened Spring down significantly by 45.5%
APR	62.0%	9.2%	
MAY	74.4%	67.4%	
SPRING	69.7%	38.0%	
JUN	85.7%	74.3%	Summer slightly down
JUL	80.1%	81.3%	
AUG	63.1%	61.6%	
SUMMER	76.3%	72.4%	
SEP	61.5%	49.8%	Fall slightly up
OCT	58.2%	59.6%	
NOV	43.1%	57.20%	
FALL	54.3%	55.5%	
ANNUAL	59.9%	53.7%	Down 10.4% for the year

\*Source: Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism

taxable retail sales; and occupancy percentage for hotels and vacation rentals.

2020 Taxable Lodging Rentals: -5.6% from 2019 (\$540.7 million\* in 2020 compared to \$572.9 million in 2019).

\*Lodging taxes collected contribute funding to the state, City of Gulf Shores, City of Orange Beach and Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism.

2020 Taxable Retail Sales: -13.7% from 2019 (\$856.2 million in 2020 compared to \$991.8 million in 2019).

**Impact on meetings and sports events**  
As the tourism mar-

keting organization for Gulf Shores, Orange Beach and the Fort Morgan Peninsula, our focus extends beyond leisure travelers. We also work to attract meetings and sporting events to drive business during our off-season, especially spring and fall. Both of these segments took major hits because of the pandemic.

**The heroes**  
Our local businesses deserve immense praise for their creativity and resilience in adapting to changing rules and guidelines last year. Restaurants created outdoor dining spaces in parking lots, vacation

	VACATION RENTAL OCCUPANCY		
	2019	2020	Highest occupancy of the year Winter slightly down
DEC	21.1%	19.3%	
JAN	53.7%	53.3%	
FEB	78.6%	75.0%	
WINTER	51.1%	49.2%	
MAR	61.0%	40.6%	COVID shutdown COVID shutdown Beaches reopened Spring down significantly by 29.6%
APR	38.9%	6.0%	
MAY	51.9%	60.3%	
SPRING	50.6%	35.6%	
JUN	77.8%	77.3%	Summer slightly up
JUL	79.6%	83.4%	
AUG	51.4%	59.0%	
SUMMER	69.6%	73.2%	
SEP	41.7%	36.0%	Fall slightly down
OCT	45.3%	32.8%	
NOV	21.0%	22.1%	
FALL	36.0%	30.3%	
ANNUAL	51.8%	47.1%	Down 9.1% for the year

\*Source: Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism

rental companies and hotels adopted additional cleaning protocols, and retail stores and attractions welcomed guests despite limited capacity. Our cities and Chambers of Commerce worked together to keep business owners informed on PPP funding and other assistance.

Visitors may have saved the day for our tourism year, but our local residents are who saved the day for so many of our tourism businesses, especially our restaurants and retail shops. We are a tourism economy built by local residents who own the businesses and local residents who support them year-round. Not since the oil spill in 2010 have our communities faced such a scary and challenging year. We

are blessed and grateful that once again, we have come out of a crisis strong, resilient, and able to welcome guests with our “Small Town, Big Beach” hospitality that shows them why “Life is Better Here.”

**About Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism:**  
Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism serves as the official destination marketing organization for the cities of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach in addition to the unincorporated area of Fort Morgan. To learn more about Alabama’s 32 miles of white-sand beaches, visit either GulfShores.com or OrangeBeach.com. Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism is an accredited Destination Marketing Organization.

Medicine

# South Baldwin Regional Medical Center

By **JESSICA VAUGHN**  
jessica@gulfcoastmedia.com

South Baldwin Regional Medical Center currently has 13 locations, with plans to further grow its network. Due to COVID, telemedicine has become a frequently used method to create new access points.

“It’s all about patient access,” CEO Eric Roach said. “We actually witnessed because of COVID, patients were afraid to go to the doctor. What we’re having to do is have telemedicine visits, and the key is we didn’t limit access. That is really a strategy for South Baldwin, to increase our access. In healthcare, if you’re not growing, you’re really in trouble, and one of the ways to grow is



SUBMITTED PHOTO

to continue to recruit and build your medical staff.”

Over the last year, Roach said the hospital has continued to recruit and employ physicians to grow its network. The hospital also increases its healthcare providers through its Residency Program, which trains future family physicians that the hospital hopes to retain within the community.

Significant growth is happening for South Baldwin Regional Medi-

cal Center. In summer 2020, ground broke on the brand-new Free-standing Emergency Department, located next to Jack Edwards Airport in Gulf Shores. The department will be 14,000 square feet, have nine exam rooms, a full complement of diagnostic imaging, lab services, and a helipad. It will be available 24/7 to serve patients who experience medical emergencies. Its anticipated opening is Spring 2021.

“It will service the

residents of Gulf Shores, Orange Beach, and Foley,” Roach said. “The residents that live in Orange Beach and Gulf Shores won’t have to drive to Foley to get these services ... It’s going to create jobs, be good for the residents at the beach, and it’s going to help Foley because one of the things hospitals are really struggling with now is capacity management. This should help us spread out the patient care and help us become more ef-

ficient in Foley.”

The hospital in Foley will also see a major expansion, with approximately \$150-\$180 million in renovations and new-facilities coming. Ground is expected to break in January 2022 at South Baldwin Regional.

This will mark the largest building program in the hospital’s history, and will include the addition of a 133,433 square foot, four-story patient tower. The tower will house a new surgical department with a new dedicated outpatient entrance, ten operating rooms including three with robotic equipment, a new endoscopy center, a new patient prep and recovery area and PACU. The tower’s second and third floors will contain nursing units, including a new,

larger intensive care unit. The future fourth floor shell space can be built out to increase the bed count based on community need.

Existing spaces will see the addition of a new laboratory and an expansion of the existing pharmacy and dietary areas. The exterior of the existing hospital will be refinished to match the new construction. Parking areas for patients and staff will also increase by more than 50 percent.

“Foley’s going to grow as a result of this, and our hospital is going to become busier,” Roach said. “This is going to generate a lot of jobs for this county and this city, so that’s really something that I think everybody should be proud of.”



# North Baldwin Infirmary

**BAY MINETTE** — North Baldwin Infirmary (NBI) celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2020, and with this milestone comes continued growth. The 78-bed facility now offers a cardiac rehabilitation program under the medical direction of Dr. Meghan Courtney, a cardiologist with Diagnostic and Medical Clinic in Bay Minette. Pre and post checks for UAB's transplant clinic are conducted via telemedicine at NBI, and the hospital's onsite oncology infusion center provides cancer treatment close to home. In the coming

year, the hospital plans to add 3D mammography, a dialysis unit and a sleep center.

The Diabetes Resource Center, accredited by the American Diabetes Association, offers group classes and one-on-one consultations. The Center was most recently recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for its effectiveness in preventing or delaying the onset of type 2 diabetes and other chronic health conditions.

Recognized for meeting the highest standards for maternity

care and infant feeding, North Baldwin Infirmary is the only Baby Friendly hospital in both Baldwin and Mobile Counties and is recognized as a Bama Better Babies Hospital. Most recently, the hospital's birth center earned a bronze Beacon Award for excellence. The birth center offers spacious rooms where mothers labor, deliver and recover and the area's only wireless fetal monitoring system.

Unique to the hospital is Senior Behavioral Health, a specialized inpatient unit for those 55-plus suffering from

mental illness. Oakwood — North Baldwin's Center for Living is a 75-bed licensed skilled nursing facility located on the hospital's campus. North Baldwin Infirmary is committed to providing the full continuum of care for the Bay Minette community.

In its commitment to growth, North Baldwin Infirmary offers telemedicine services thanks to a grant received from within the Infirmary Health system in 2020. This offering is essential to ensuring patients in northern Baldwin County have access to

the highest quality of care.

North Baldwin Infirmary's staff is dedicated to patient safety. The hospital has earned an "A" Leapfrog Safety Grade for six consecutive grading periods, and for two years in a row, the hospital has received the Women's Choice Award for patient safety.

In the fight against COVID-19, the hospital was one of the first in the area to provide monoclonal antibody infusions to patients with COVID-19. Together, with Thomas Hospital, NBI has adminis-

tered more than 20,000 COVID-19 vaccines in Baldwin County. As a hospital system, Infirmiry Health has administered nearly 50,000 vaccines in both Mobile and Baldwin Counties.

Infirmary Health is composed of four hospitals, two post-acute care facilities, more than 60 medical clinics and other affiliates. Infirmary Health serves all counties along the Gulf Coast and offers the most advanced technology, comprehensive treatment and highest quality care to remain the first choice for healthcare in the region.

# Thomas Hospital

**FAIRHOPE** — Thomas Hospital continues to provide comprehensive award-winning services to meet the growth of Baldwin County. With the addition of neonatologists, Thomas Hospital is able to provide special care to newborns who need extra medical care, as well as pregnant women who are considered high risk. Keeping newborns and moth-

ers who require extra care together provides comfort for families who would otherwise have to travel across the bay. The hospital also has board certified pediatric hospitalists that are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to care for hospitalized children up to 18 years old. The program was developed in response to a growing need in Bald-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

win County, as more pediatricians are focusing exclusively on their clinical services.

In 2020, the hospital brought 3D mammography technology to the radiology depart-

ment at Thomas Medical Center in Daphne. Thanks to the Thomas Hospital Foundation and Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, The Breast Center at Thomas Hospital installed a second 3D mammography screening device and 3D whole breast ultrasound equipment for detection of breast cancer in women who have dense breasts. This latest technology

aids in the early detection of cancer.

**Infirmiry Cancer  
Care at Thomas Hospital  
is the only Commission  
on Cancer Accredited  
credited program in  
Baldwin County. The  
comprehensive cancer  
program, located on  
the campus of Thomas  
Hospital, includes board  
certified oncologists.**

SEE **THOMAS**, PAGE 8

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# Gateway Provides Value through the Apprenticeship Training Program for Baldwin Businesses



Stacy English,  
Frances Holk-Jones State Farm Insurance



Victoria Wright,  
Front of House Manager, Wolf Bay Restaurants

“ I like a good challenge, and that's what this was. Not only did I gain knowledge for myself, but I will be able to use what I have learned in our shop and to help out someone else going through the same program. ”

Seth Hollis, SPW Press Operator, Vulcan, Inc.

Employers in Baldwin County are discovering a new type of employee. They create the future workforce, lift up the community, and help grow local businesses. We call them **apprentices**.

For years, Registered Apprenticeship (RA) has been a proven, promising pathway to careers in skilled trades like carpentry and welding. Now, in Baldwin County, this employer-driven model is working in non-traditional roles like Restaurant Manager and Customer Service Representative. Nationwide, there are apprenticeship programs in more than 1,400 occupations, including jobs in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, hospitality and tourism, and engineering and building trades to name a few.

The apprenticeship model combines on-the-job training with job-related instruction (inside or outside formal classroom settings). A key component of the model is an apprentice's skill level progressively increases alongside his/her wage. As a Department of Labor *Apprenticeship Sponsor*, through the chamber, the Gateway Initiative can assess the viability of the apprenticeship model for a business and explain the substantial tax incentives and wage reimbursements available through the program. Upon implementing the program, individuals begin working and participating in classroom and paid on-the-job training. Some apprentices complete related instruction through a community college to obtain job-related skills, while others receive this education through corporate training programs, as seen in large brands like Marriott. Upon completing their training, registered apprentices are awarded a nationally portable, industry-recognized certificate or license that enables them to practice in their fields.

Coastal Alabama Community College (Coastal) is also an *Apprenticeship Sponsor* as registered by the Alabama Office of Apprenticeship and the US Department of Labor. Gateway's programs concentrate on hospitality and tourism and customer service-related professions, whereas Coastal specializes in technical professional training. "The partnership is very unique," said Ed Bushaw of the Gateway team. "Not only have we partnered with Coastal for related-instruction opportunities, but we are also able to refer certain businesses to them when they are the leading industry experts, such as HVAC service or construction trades."

## Employer Benefits

Why YOU should utilize the apprenticeship program:

- ⇒ Improve productivity, profitability, and an employer's bottom line
- ⇒ Create flexible training options that ensure workers develop the right skills
- ⇒ Minimize liability costs through appropriate training of workers
- ⇒ In Alabama, receive a \$1,250 **tax credit** for up to 10 apprentices for each Employer Identification Number. The tax credit is raised to \$1,750 for apprentices ages 16 & 17. There are also wage reimbursement programs and grants in place to offset apprenticeship training costs
- ⇒ **Increase** retention of workers, during and following the apprenticeship
- ⇒ Recruit and develop a **highly-skilled workforce**

The South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce will not discriminate against apprenticeship applicants or apprentices based on RACE, COLOR, RELIGION, NATIONAL ORIGIN, SEX (INCLUDING PREGNANCY AND GENDER IDENTITY), SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENETIC INFORMATION, OR BECAUSE THEY ARE AN INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY OR A PERSON 40 YEARS OLD OR OLDER. The South Baldwin Chamber will take affirmative action to provide equal opportunity in apprenticeship and will operate the apprenticeship program as required under Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations, part 30.







# WHAT IS APPRENTICESHIP



Photo credit: Coastal Alabama Community College

“ Gateway has created and is providing a connection to quality employment opportunities for our graduating students. This partnership is important for the community and local businesses as Baldwin County continues to grow. ”

Mitchell Lee, Executive Director,  
South Baldwin Literacy Council

The Gateway team has access to more than 1,700 business members from the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce and the Coastal Alabama Business Chamber. Gateway typically conducts business assessments to offer innovative solutions for entrepreneurs, and apprenticeship can be a great tool in many situations. Once an assessment is complete, and the career pathways offered by partner employers are determined, Gateway works to set-up the program. “For instance, with our restaurant partners, we offer apprenticeships for a *Chef* career path by introducing the apprenticeship model for Line Cooks and Sous Chefs, which eventually leads them to obtain a *Chef* credential,” said Bushaw. Students at the age of 16 can enter into the 2,000-hour paid Line Cook apprenticeship and work to complete the related-instruction requirement within their high school culinary program. Once they complete the Line Cook apprenticeship they can move directly into the Sous Chef program. In essence, in this path, an individual can stack their credentials, obtain three journey-worker cards and ultimately achieve credentials as a registered Chef.

Continuing with the trend of **partnership**, Gateway has recently kicked-off collaboration efforts with the South Baldwin Literacy Council, which offers free educational services at their Foley location. They offer GED tutoring, English as a Second Language classes, and a variety of other educational services and tutoring programs. According to Mitchell Lee, Executive Director, “the missing piece for our clients at the completion of this program was a job opportunity. With Gateway, the puzzle is now complete as they have placed nearly every graduate we’ve sent their way!”

Over the last several weeks Gateway has been developing messaging and presentations for Literacy Council students to introduce them to career pathways and opportunities right here in South Baldwin. “Together with our partners, we can offer credentials of value to these individuals as they move through their career path in fields like Hotel/Resort Management, Marine Technician, HVAC Technician, Construction Trades, Restaurant Management, Vacation Rental Management, Chef, and many positions in Advanced Manufacturing,” said Tyler Brunson, Project Coordinator for the Gateway team. Apprenticeships offer Literacy Council graduates an experience that includes a progressive wage structure, on-the-job training from a master mentor, and required related-instruction offered by the company or through Coastal Alabama Community College.



# Housing

## Local expertise is the key to the future of Baldwin County real estate

By **KAYLA SANDERS**  
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**ROBERTSDALE** — While many things slowed down in 2020, real estate was not among them. Even amidst a global pandemic and a low-inventory market, Baldwin County still managed to top 2019’s sales volume, sales price and total properties sold. Properties also spent less time on the market than the year prior.

According to Baldwin REALTORS® Multiple Listing Service (MLS), the only statistic which was lacking in 2020 (compared to 2019) was in the category of new listings/inventory. The total amount of residential new listings with effective dates in 2020 was 12,720 properties, compared to 13,063 in 2019. This statistic is one of the main factors perpetuating the current seller’s market. A total of 9,214 properties sold in Baldwin



County last year, which is a significant increase of 14.3% from 2019’s 8,063. Additionally, these properties moved even faster with an average of 95 days spent on the market, compared to 102 days in 2019. Last year’s total sales volume saw the highest increase at 19.4%, totaling \$2,835,915,934, compared to \$2,375,875,815, in 2019. The average

sales prices of residential properties sold in Baldwin County also increased 4.3% to \$307,457. The average sales price was \$294,663, in 2019. Between a hot market and a “new way of normal” thanks to the virus, the real estate industry has been evolving at record pace with many third-party disruptors pushing consumers to purely web-based buy-

ing experiences. “I believe that what we’re seeing is a direct result of long-term trends that have been going on for many years,” said Rob Hahn, managing partner of 7DS Associates and author of the Notorious ROB blog. “It’s just that COVID accelerated things [in 2020], and many companies are now making moves based on these trends.” In response, Baldwin REALTORS® is entering into a time of strategic planning for the years ahead and consulting the knowledge of a national industry expert. “What we’re learning is that the local expertise and advocacy of a REALTOR® is the irreplaceable variance between our association and the third-party aggregators,” said Andrea Shilston, Baldwin REALTORS® 2021 president. “While we may not be able to compete financially with national brands, we can position

our members as true partners for buyers and sellers. That’s what we’re working towards with these planning sessions.” Baldwin REALTORS® Chief Executive Officer, Sheila Dodson, also added, “There are many nuances to Baldwin County real estate that these national third-party websites are missing. From an educated explanation of Fairhope Single Tax to the awareness of Gold FORTIFIED Home® insurance discounts to even the smallest details of where the sun rises and sets on a home, our REALTORS® are the experts on Baldwin County.” Baldwin REALTORS® has already begun the initial process of proving the value of local expertise through their Baldwin County Certified Specialist program, which launched in 2020. The program essentially certifies experienced agents as local special-

ists in one or more of three Baldwin County “areas”: Resort, Eastern Shore and Rural. “So far we have certified over 50 members,” said Dodson. “These agents have been accepted upon a thorough application checking their years of experience, number of transactions, and association and community involvement. And, upon acceptance, they have completed five days of in-person and online coursework to prove their knowledge in their ‘area’ of specialty.” “The Baldwin County Certified Specialist program was created and implemented as a direct result of our previous Strategic Plan in which we aimed to increase professionalism in our industry,” said Shilston. “Now we are looking at how we can build upon its momentum of highlighting REALTORS® as the local professionals you want in your corner.”

## Baldwin County Home Builders Association provide heart and soul of community

Submitted

The Baldwin County Home Builders Association is a trade association that serves its members by promoting the home building and construction trade industry, monitoring legislative/ regulatory issues and providing educational and networking opportunities. BCHBA’s goal is to provide and expand the opportunity for all consumers to have safe, decent and affordable housing. Chartered in 1973, the association is currently 845 members strong with over 6,000-member employees. The membership is comprised of 198 builder companies, 623 associate companies and 24 affiliates. Builders must be li-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

censed by the Alabama Home Builders License Board. Builders are the heart and soul of our association, from small volume builders and remodelers, to light commercial, multifamily and production builders. Associates are comprised of any person, firm or corporation in the building industry as a supplier of prod-

ucts or services and the many craftsmen. From selling lumber to financing mortgages, associates are a vital part of our association. Members receive numerous money-saving benefits through local, state and national business discounts on products, services and even insurance. Other benefits include oppor-

tunities to participate in monthly events such as the annual Home & Product Show, Parade of Homes, silent auction, golf and fishing tournaments and projects benefiting local charities as well as numerous networking events. The association has a charitable foundation to support its educational and chari-

table activities. It was founded to support and engage in charitable activities dedicated to the improvement of community housing and the residential housing community. It provides scholarships for students pursuing a career in the building industry as well as other educational programs. Scholarship applications can

be found online at [www.BCHBA.com](http://www.BCHBA.com). The association is reaching out to students to encourage them to consider a career in the building industry. Whether it be as a builder, architect, HVAC, plumber, carpenter, electrician, welder, landscaper, there is a dire need for skilled individuals. Membership provides a unique opportunity for individuals to help shape the future of their business and the home building industry. Membership begins at the local level and automatically includes membership in the state and national associations. To find out more about the association, visit online at [www.BCHBA.com](http://www.BCHBA.com) and on Facebook.

## THOMAS

CONTINUED FROM 5

hematologists, radiation oncologists and surgeons. The most recent additions to the cancer program are Dr. Olivia Claire Ball, radiation oncologist; Dr. Addison Willet, radiation oncologist and Dr. Kannan Thanikachalam, medical oncologist/hematologist. In addition to onsite therapy services, the cancer program includes a nurse naviga-

tor and several support groups. Patient room renovation was competed on the second floor of Thomas Hospital’s medical/surgical unit in 2020 and renovation began on a portion the hospital’s third floor to expand Colony Rehabilitation Hospital from 12 to 25 patient rooms. Colony Rehabilitation Hospital is the only comprehensive acute rehabilitation facility for patients with physical and neurological disorders in Baldwin

County. The hospital recently earned CARF accreditation for quality services and best possible outcomes. Thomas Hospital, an affiliate of Infirmity Health, has received numerous awards including Blue Distinctions from Blue Cross Blue Shield for orthopedics, cardiac care and maternity care. Thomas Hospital’s birth center is the recipient of the silver Beacon Award for Excellence, and in January 2021, the hospital

was recognized by the Women’s Choice Award as one of the nation’s best hospitals for outpatient experience and was ranked in the top 5% of hospitals for orthopedics and the top 8% of hospitals for heart care nationwide. In addition, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services rated Thomas Hospital as a four-star hospital based on mortality, safety of care, readmission, patient experience, effectiveness of care, timeliness of care and

efficient use of medical imaging. Thomas Hospital is extremely active in the fight against COVID-19. In addition to the onsite COVID-19 vaccine clinic, Thomas Hospital and North Baldwin Infirmity have partnered with local organizations, such as churches, colleges and governmental agencies, to administer more than 20,000 vaccinations in Baldwin County. As a hospital system, Infirmity Health has administered

nearly 50,000 vaccines in both Mobile and Baldwin Counties. Infirmity Health is composed of four hospitals, two post-acute care facilities, more than 60 medical clinics and other affiliates. Infirmity Health serves all counties along the Gulf Coast and offers the most advanced technology, comprehensive treatment and highest quality care to remain the first choice for healthcare in the region.



# 2020 Year in Review

## The Baldwin County Chamber Coalition

The Baldwin County Chamber Coalition is a collaborative voice of the five Baldwin County Chambers of Commerce, the Central Baldwin Chamber of Commerce, the Coastal Alabama Business Chamber, South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce, Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce and North Baldwin Chamber of Commerce, aiming to promote and protect the collective interests of 3,500 businesses and 74,000 employees in Coastal Alabama.

The Coalition advocates for local issues that matter most for the economic prosperity and quality of life for our local businesses and residents. The business legislative agenda represents the common interests of our businesses regarding important legislative issues that matter most to them.

### Infrastructure

The Baldwin County Chamber Coalition supports legislative policies that will:

- Expand and improve reliable broadband connectivity across Baldwin County necessary for increased economic development and improved quality of life for residents.
- Ensure adequate and responsible investments in local developments and infrastructure improvements that will improve Baldwin County’s roads and bridges without adversely impacting quality of life.

### Workforce and Education

The Baldwin County Chamber Coalition supports legislative policies that will:

- Increase funding and incentives for workforce development programs aimed at educating and improving the highly skilled workforce needed across all industry clusters, namely programs born from or inspired by Gov. Kay Ivey’s Success Plus program, including other profes-

- sional development and technical training programs (e.g. SAWDC, ATN, AIDT).
- Encourage local administrators and officials to seek guidance from business leaders and Chambers of Commerce workforce experts on decisions affecting career skills training programs.
- Incentivize and promote improved housing availability and costs needed to match workforce needs in Baldwin County.
- Incentivize and increase the availability of childcare options for working parents/guardians, including efforts to provide tax incentives for those that offer such services outside of conventional daycare hours.

### Economic Development

The Baldwin County Chamber Coalition supports legislative policies that will:

- Ensure the reauthorization, improvement, and extension of

- proven economic development incentives and tax credits, including the promotion of Opportunity zone investment opportunities.
- Ensure a healthy and thriving economy through efforts to recruit large-scale advanced manufacturing companies to the South Alabama Mega Site.
- Ensure all GOMESA (Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act) funding is dedicated to Coastal Alabama.

### Health Care, Environment and Quality of Life

The Baldwin County Chamber Coalition supports legislative policies that will:

- Improve funding for and access to quality healthcare and mental wellness facilities, programming and providers across Baldwin County.
- Emphasize the need for mental health experts to be incorporated into the criminal justice system through the creation of a Baldwin

county Mental Health Court as outlined in HB 166.

- Continue to provide for the creation or restoration of responsible and sustainable interactions with and the enjoyment of our natural resources, including but not limited to the Causeway Master Plan, Baldwin County beaches, the Mobile Bay and the Tensaw River Delta.
- Incentivize and promote eco-friendly business practices that contribute to creating new and sustaining existing businesses and industry in Baldwin County.
- Incentivize and promote responsible and sustainable residential development that considers the safety, welfare, enjoyment and affordability of housing for all citizens of Baldwin County.

### COVID-19 statement:

The Baldwin County Chamber Coalition will support legislation and policies that will protect our member businesses during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic and recovery.

The Coalition will continue to utilize as many resources as possible to help our member businesses keep their doors open. We will continue to sort through and share resources to help our member businesses make the best decisions for their organizations. Our main goal is to protect each of you in as many ways as possible for your health and safety, legally, financially, and for the greater good of our local economies.

For more information, find the Baldwin County Chamber Coalition on Facebook or reach out to any of the five Baldwin County Chambers of Commerce.



## Central Baldwin Chamber

The Central Baldwin Chamber of Commerce celebrated its 45th Anniversary in a year filled with challenges that included a global pandemic and two hurricanes.

Thanks to a dedicated staff with a strong commitment, along with support from an active Board of Directors, the CBCC rose to the occasion.

“The chamber was able to shift gears and continue serving our members and community by keeping them informed and armed with COVID-19 business resources when the pandemic hit our county in March of last year,” Chamber President and CEO Gail Quezada said. “We powered through 2020, playing a vital role, and I am proud to say that our Chamber remained open to support the needs of our businesses when they needed us most.”

The CBCC represents hundreds of small businesses and nonprofits, along with four municipalities — the city of Robertsdale and towns of Loxley, Silverhill and Summerdale, as well as the Baldwin County Commission.

Prior to COVID-19, the CBCC held a success-

ful Annual Meeting in January 2020 with an estimated 400 in attendance. Officials wrapped up 2019 by presenting chamber and municipality awards to local businesses and community leaders.

In February 2020, Business@Breakfast hosted guest speaker Baldwin County Coroner Brian Pierce, who discussed “Growth through the Eyes of the Coroner.”

Then came March and a world-wide shutdown, so the CBCC staff got creative.

“The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted our business community, and we all have been working hard to recover,” Quezada said. “Early in the pandemic, the Chamber recognized that we had a vital role in helping our community through the crisis.”

In May 2020, the CBCC held the first virtual Prayer Breakfast, which turned out a success and had a large out-reach. Former president of the University of Mobile, Dr. Mark Foley, served as guest speaker.

Also in May, the Honoring our Heroes luncheon celebrated first responders as a drive-through event instead of the usual sit-

down affair. Robertsdale Church of Christ served as home base, as the CBCC handed out boxed lunches to officials from the Baldwin County Sheriff’s Department, fire departments, EMA, EMT and police departments.

The CBCC also hosted small business webinars, geared to assist members during COVID-19, including Attorney Jared Lyles of Jared N. Lyles PC, who spoke on “Legal Issues During COVID-19;” Jamie Hardy with Gruenloh, Hardy & Associates, PC, who gave a “Q&A with Local CPA;” Monde Donaldson with the BBB, who addressed “How to Spot a Con” and Ramona Hill with Workshops, Etc! who spoke on how to “Change Management for Changing Times.”

As pandemic restrictions slowly lifted, the Central Baldwin business community worked hard to regain momentum lost in 2020, Quezada said.

Then came Hurricane Sally on Sept. 16, a Category 2 storm that left over 100,000 without power in Baldwin County and resulted in about \$300 million in damages across the Alabama coast. Businesses experienced additional

hardships — though to a lesser extent — when Hurricane Zeta hit Oct. 24.

“We suffered significant damage to many small businesses from Sally, some of whom were still recovering from the pandemic, but our community is strong, as the past year showed, and many have learned that they can adapt faster than they ever thought,” Quezada said.

The CBCC was proud to have local business and Chamber member Stastka Insurance Agency Inc. recognized as one of only 16 finalists for the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama and Business Council of Alabama’s Small Business of the Year for 2020. The CBCC submits business awards through the CCAA and BCA each year.

The Junior Executive Youth Leadership and Scholarship Program also continued to grow throughout 2020, giving Central Baldwin high school juniors and seniors an opportunity to hone leadership skills through hands-on work experience, classes, and community involvement.

Students interact with local business and community leaders, attend

a luncheon with elected officials and tour the State Capitol. They also volunteer at Chamber events such as Flavors of the South and the Annual Meeting and attend Dave Ramsey Financial Series classes.

Junior Executives are eligible for scholarships awarded to qualifying seniors, and last year, Central Baldwin students received \$6,000 in scholarships.

“These opportunities allow the students to learn about the business industry, understand the importance of civic responsibility, and experience the role of the Chamber,” Quezada

said. The CBCC also adds its voice to the collaboration of the five Baldwin County chambers of commerce as a member of the Baldwin County Chamber Coalition.

The aim is to promote and protect the collective interests of 3,500 businesses and 74,000 employees in Coastal Alabama.

With just under 400 members, the CBCC continues to promote core initiatives, provide resources, and promote and advocate for local business, quality of life, education, infrastructure, workforce and economic development.





# North Baldwin Chamber

Submitted by  
NB CHAMBER STAFF

The North Baldwin Chamber of Commerce has been serving Bay Minette and the surrounding communities since 1945, celebrating 76 years of service in 2021. Representing more than 300 members and 5,000 employees, the North Baldwin Chamber of Commerce is a business focused, member supported organization that works with the community to develop sustainable economic growth and to enhance the quality of life for all residents, business owners and employees. We work to represent the interests of our members and the wider community, and by doing so we are a united voice for progress in our area.

2020 began as any other year in our corner of Baldwin County. Your North Baldwin Chamber was geared up for a great year of progress and celebration as 2020 marked the Chamber’s 75th Birthday. A plan was developed to introduce new programming, enhance existing events, and continue to deliver results that benefitted our members and the community. On March 1 we hired a full-time membership manager to help

us deliver all that had been imagined. Shortly after, our plans changed, as did all of yours.

COVID-19 delivered a hard pause for our community and county and caused a hard stop for many chambers across the country. The North Baldwin Chamber worked quickly and diligently amid uncertainty to evaluate the situation, identify the needs of our business community, and to pivot operations to continue to support you. The success of 2020 cannot be measured by in person attendance of events or by new businesses opening, but by the innovation of your North Baldwin Chamber to be flexible in answering the call of our members, by our reaction instead of our proactivity.

In 2020 the North Baldwin Chamber represented more than 300 members, saw an 89 percent retention rate and delivered a 373 percent return on investment as the average dues paid per member was \$186 while the organizational cost per member in programming and services provided was \$695. The Chamber continued to offer a health benefits program that made health, dental and vision insurance available to members; hosted

24 member-focused events; and continued to work collaboratively with the Baldwin County Chambers of Commerce through the Baldwin County Chamber Coalition to consistently offer a united voice for business in Baldwin County.

The North Baldwin Chamber continued efforts in workforce development and education awarding more than \$10,000 in scholarships to local students through the Junior Ambassador Program and the Young Professionals Scholarship Program.

Your North Baldwin Chamber worked in partnership through the Chamber Coalition to continue to advocate for our business community when it came to COVID-19 Relief and legislation that would protect you. We worked to implement a Small Business Relief Fund to provide immediate, impactful relief to our Small Business Community and have awarded more than \$28,000 in grants to 20 locally owned small businesses. We launched media campaigns to encourage residents to “Social Distance Dine” and support to go meals and curbside pickup opportunities for local restaurants and retailers. Chamber staff took



time to reach out to every chamber member to identify the individual needs of each business. To continue to grow our voice we launched an online membership application and welcomed 52 new chamber members in 2020. We continued to provide timely, adequate, and valuable information as it became available.

Hurricane Sally offered another opportunity for further collaboration throughout the County as the Baldwin County Chamber Coalition effectively worked together, yet again, in response for recovery and resiliency.

Your North Baldwin Chamber worked with

elected officials to effectively communicate and align advocacy efforts to meet the needs of our Business Community. 2020 was a challenging year in so many ways, but your Chamber never stopped working, educating, or advocating for your business.

In 2021, the North Baldwin Chamber of Commerce will continue to focus on what is important to you and respond to your needs through our work in the areas of business development and resiliency, workforce development and education, and economic and community development to improve the quality of life for all residents,

business owners, and employees. We will continue to represent the interests of our members and the wider community to create a united voice for progress in our area.

The North Baldwin Chamber commits to continue to provide you with essential services, essential resources, and essential programing today and always. 2021 will not be without its own set of challenges; looking back we are proud of the work of the North Baldwin Chamber in 2020 and look forward to continuing to adapt, overcome and continue to pivot to meet the needs of our North Baldwin Business Community.

# Eastern Shore Chamber

STAFF REPORT

FAIRHOPE — The Eastern Chamber of Commerce grew in 2020 and expanded programs despite challenges from COVID-19, hurricanes and other setbacks.

Casey Gay Williams, executive director of the chamber, said the last year has been one of adaptation.

“You learn and you struggle and our motto was we may not be able to do this, but what is it that we can do,” Williams said. “Whether it’s smaller or in a different place or however it needs to come together, how do we keep some momentum of connecting people and providing them an opportunity to work and how do we make our events doable in light of all the restrictions. It was a challenge, but I think we came out the better for it.”

One challenge was moving the Jubilee Festival, both in time and location, to deal with the pandemic and effects of Hurricane Sally.

“We were able to put on the Jubilee Festival and people were ready to be outdoors and we were

able to move that event to Lott Park, so that we had much more distance between the booths, both side to side and front to front,” Williams said. “It was so good and worked so well that we’ll be back there in 2021 and we will also keep the date in October when it’s a little cooler.”

During the 2020 city elections, the chamber had planned debates between the mayoral candidates in the three Eastern Shore cities, Spanish Fort, Daphne and Fairhope. Those debates were moved to a virtual format.

“We were able to do that informational candidate forum,” Williams said. “We also did our voters guide. We did a lot of things. Made sure there was a way to connect with them digitally. You just have to think differently at times like that.”

With Mardi Gras parades canceled, local businesses took Carnival to their places of business in the last year with the chamber’s “Jazzing It Up for Mardi Gras,” decorating contest, she said.

“We couldn’t have

Mardi Gras, so we had a Mardi Gras decorating contest that was open to members and non-members and we had an incredible response to that and some businesses had over 2,000, 3,000 reaches through social media,” Williams said. “We were very excited to use the tools we did have to promote our businesses. We can’t have Mardi Gras, but that doesn’t mean we can have fun and promote our members. It was amazing how many people watched and participated and voted.”

Other chamber activities were also conducted over virtual formats for a time. Williams said the chamber’s goal during the last year has continued to be to support the local businesses that make up its membership.

“Throughout 2020, we have been a business chamber,” Williams said. “We are here to support business and during the difficult time, that was one of our primary roles, to make sure that people had access to good information about the different loans and grants and resources. That was an important

role that we played and when we got ready to look back at 2020, after the first of the year, we said we wondered what 2020 actually looked like from an annual report standpoint. I have to say I was really pleased that we were able to make some changes very quickly, and still be able to do a Zoom interview on Facebook live so that people could hear our mayoral candidates, doing virtual Business After Hours, which, of course, they were not nearly as big virtually as they would have been in person, but I think that gave people a little more way to meet people that they may not have been able to meet before.”

In 2020, the chamber added 70 members to finish the year with 1,050.

“We’re adding members almost daily and we, throughout the shutdown in 2020, we actually didn’t invoice our members,” Williams said. “I felt it was bad form when people’s doors were closed, they were not able to conduct business. If there was a business where the shutdown had affected them, we didn’t invoice them



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Jubilee Festival

until they were able to reopen and we have given some latitude to give people a chance to get back on their feet. In the meanwhile, we have businesses who benefited from our information who are now joining the chamber because they want to support the business community and they realize there’s some wonderful value there.”

Williams said members hope to expand activities in 2021 as the pandemic slows down.

“We are excited about being able to get back to some of those organic connections through networking in person,” she said. “We try to do a hybrid event when we can, so if you are not comfortable coming in person, we may have 10 people on the Zoom

screen and 15 or 20 people socially distanced in person, so we will continue to roll out new and creative ways for small groups to connect.”

One new event planned for 2021 is Lemonade Day, a chance for young people to practice their entrepreneurial skills.

“We’re excited about adding Lemonade Day on the Eastern Shore. Lemonade Day and so we’re going to do ours in the fall on Nov. 6,” Williams said. “We’re excited about having something new that dovetails into our workforce initiative by this Lemonade Day entrepreneurial training program. We hope to have 100 lemonade stands around the Eastern Shore by Nov. 6.”



# Coastal Alabama Business Chamber

When key member benefits like events and in-person committee meetings no longer were an option, it became a challenge for the Coastal Alabama Business Chamber to determine what the new operations goals were to get through the COVID-19 outbreak.

“I can remember sitting in our boardroom with the staff and everything coming to a halt right in front of our eyes. I just started thinking ... ‘what do we do next?’” said Greg Alexander, Chamber president and CEO, “It was truly a confusing time. We’d been prepared for a lot, but nothing like this.”

Alexander soon made it a mission to absorb as much incoming information as possible in order to develop a constantly updating COVID-19 resources page on the Chamber’s website. Any incoming news from

the cities, state, tourism board, and even the Chamber itself was added and updated as it became available. Daily conference calls were arranged through the Chamber’s workforce development partner the Gateway Initiative with leaders and business owners all throughout Baldwin County to ensure information being distributed was accurate and to communicate the struggles and assistance needed from various industries.

The Gateway Initiative also authored daily information emails which were blasted out to members of the Coastal Alabama and South Baldwin Chambers of Commerce.

“It’s hard to believe we had that much consistently changing information worthy of sending out daily, but it truly was the case,” Alexander said. “Throughout



March and April, it seemed like there was a new bombshell each day. It was a lot to take in and we wanted to ensure our members had an information hub they could trust.”

The mission to keep members informed continued when Hurricane Sally struck the Gulf Coast. Although when wireless connections and laptops were rendered useless in mass power outages, the Chamber staff turned to smartphones and social media.

As safety updates and offerings of food and supplies popped up, they were shared onto the Chamber’s newsfeeds. “It was truly a beautiful thing to see our local business owners, many of whom were struggling themselves, stepping up to offer things like food and supplies to residents in need,” Alexander said.

Amongst the challenges of the year, the Chamber was in the process of planning the opening of an additional office to serve businesses



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

in the Orange Beach area. After delays during the COVID-19 outbreak, construction on the office at The Wharf continued and staff members were officially able to begin working inside on June 25. What was once a blank canvas turned into a fully loaded space with a lobby, conference room, and five office spaces thanks to a partnership with the City of Orange Beach and The Wharf.

The goals the Chamber holds for 2021 is to make up for all that was lost in 2020 and then some. Since the beginning of

the year the Chamber has slowly begun to reintroduce events like ribbon cuttings, networking events and First Friday Forums, back into community schedules. Planning has even continued for the 49th edition of the Annual National Shrimp Festival, on the calendar for Oct. 7-10, with committee members meeting to discuss event planning and logistics. Looking to the future, Alexander said, “We’ve lost a lot and we’ve missed each other, and I think it’s about time we begin to our normal duties as a Chamber once again.”

# South Baldwin Chamber

Submitted by THE SOUTH BALDWIN CHAMBER STAFF

2020 presented many new challenges to our local business community. First the COVID-19 pandemic, then the destruction from Hurricane Sally, left many business owners struggling to find ways to cope.

“After celebrating 75 years as a Chamber of Commerce, we, along with our entire community endured a year of challenges on our way to 2021,” said South Baldwin Chamber President/CEO Donna Watts. “Many called 2020 an unprecedented time. Indeed it was. Local effects of a worldwide pandemic brought not only concerns for health and safety but also business closures, new regulations, and financial burdens.”

Throughout it all, the South Baldwin Chamber team looked at the situation not with defeat, but as an opportunity to find new ways to help the business community thrive.

## Membership & Events

“Through the pandemic, the Chamber shifted into crisis mode for our membership,” said Travis Valentine, vice president of Investor Relations. “This meant focusing a great deal of effort on communicating and distributing the most up-to-date and accurate information possible to our businesses and leadership.”

This was done via the weekly Chamber email,

social media outlets and monthly newsletters. The Gateway Initiative team hosted daily pandemic calls, featuring updates from health leaders in the state, tourism in our area, city and county elected officials, and the latest information on loans, unemployment, reopening strategies and best practices to keep customers and citizens safe.

The Chamber’s website was kept updated with the latest information collected from top resources. Video and conference calls with financial institutions and government agencies were organized to ensure businesses were informed of SBA loans as they became available.

“We were also able to release an early database of which banks and credit unions would be issuing the loans and who would be accepting new customers and when,” said Valentine.

Most Chamber events were postponed due to social distancing protocols, but many simply found a new venue: virtual. AM Connections switched to Zoom as opposed to face-to-face, and the very first Drive-Thru Business After Hours was a big hit with attendees. Four outdoor events, the Magnolia Run, Chicago Street Super Club, and two golf tournaments were held with mask and social distancing requests. All events were well attended. A portion of the funds raised from the Magnolia Run were donated to the Turkey

Take Out Program.

Other in person events included several Leadership series with topics relevant to local businesses concerning the pandemic. Topics included mental health in the workplace presented by AltaPointe and status of local healthcare presented by South Baldwin Regional Medical Center.

Following Hurricane Sally, the Chamber quickly contacted members via phone, email and a survey to determine the needs of community businesses and available resources they possessed that could help others. This allowed the team to connect resources like tarps, tree removal services, roofing contractors, or basics like water or food to those in need.

“Through a year filled with adversity, the South Baldwin Chamber was able to find innovative ways to increase communication, help businesses and serve our membership and community,” Valentine said. “Our membership numbers remain steady with new members continuing to join each month.” The work and commitment by the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce and partners played a big part in keeping our community a pleasant, prosperous, and safe place to live, work and play.

**South Baldwin Chamber Foundation**

March 2020, right as the whispers of a shutdown became more concrete, the South Baldwin

Chamber Foundation was able to host the Annual BBQ & Blues Cook-Off, the Foundation’s largest fundraiser of the year. Over 50 students from local schools served by the Foundation participated in the BBQ & Blues Cook-Off T-shirt Design Contest, and \$28,400 was awarded to 12 local schools through the Teacher-Student Grant Program.

The Foundation also added another private school under its service umbrella - South Baldwin Christian Academy. This brings the total number of schools serviced by the Foundation to 13: St. Benedict’s Catholic School, Snook Christian Academy, South Baldwin Christian Academy, Elberta High, Elberta Middle, Elberta Elementary, Summerdale, Swift Elementary, Magnolia Elementary, Foley High, Foley Middle, Foley Elementary, and Florence B. Mathis Elementary.

**Gateway Initiative**

The Gateway Initiative is a rapidly evolving workforce and entrepreneurial development leader in Baldwin County, with a core value of “business-driven programing. The initiative is recognized and highly respected within the State of Alabama, having a foundation based on collaboration within the business community. In 2019, the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce and the Coastal Alabama Business Chamber came together to expand the



SUBMITTED PHOTO

## Magnolia Run

programming model and throughout 2020, this collaboration has proven to be extremely successful.

Gateway facilitated over 60 calls and meetings to align local leaders and elected officials with the needs of the business community in the wake of the pandemic shutdown and after Hurricane Sally. The team developed over 100 communications (emails, social media posts, and more) to spread the word about programs and partner’s offerings. Nearly 200 local professionals participated in Gateway Training Academy courses, exclusive professional development training opportunities (including Gateway to Great Customer Service, AIDT Leadership Skills, and Auburn’s Organizational Management Series). Gateway also co-developed over 60 videos of local entrepreneurs, helping them tell their stories and rep their businesses.

“Through community partnerships, the Gateway Initiative will continue executing business-driven programs to address the most critical needs in the region,” said Director of Busi-

ness Innovation Sally Westendorf.

“Everyone knows with growth comes opportunity, and with this area’s ongoing positive economic growth, leaders must work to develop and execute a long-term strategy,” said Watts. “We invite you to join us as we build for the future of existing and new businesses; to discover more opportunities and raise the quality of life for all citizens.”

**From the SBCC President & CEO**

“Through relationships with local, state, and federal agencies and elected officials, your Chamber has continuously advocated for our business community, the lifeblood of our economy and our people,” said Watts. “We work every day to keep our businesses and community strong and hope you’ll join us in that effort. Together we can build a stronger, even more resilient place we call home.”

For more information, visit [www.southbaldwin-chamber.com](http://www.southbaldwin-chamber.com), <https://gatewayinitiative.com>, Facebook @SouthBaldwinChamberofCommerce, and Facebook @TheGatewayInitiative.





# WHERE WE TREAT YOUR PET LIKE FAMILY



*“The customers are pleased with our work, and we keep our prices down.” — Ronnie Parker*

Parker Kennels started twenty-one years ago in 1998, brought to life by a family with a plan.

“My son worked for one of the vets here in town, and they were always full,” said owner Ronnie Parker. “He said to me one day, ‘Dad, we need to build a kennel.’ So I told him we would go and look to see what we could find out about doing just that. We did that and picked out what we liked, and then we designed it ourselves.”

The Parker family built about 80 percent of the original building themselves, taking on the majority of the work. It was a family effort with their daughter, son and grandchildren. For the first four years of business, Ronnie ran the business with his wife, the only two employees onsite.

“You can’t just jump in and hire people, not until you get your clientele,” Parker said. “So we just built it up together, then finally we hired one employee, then two, and now we’re up to seven employees plus two professional groomers.”

During the off-season, the kennels are often half-full. Once the summer starts, they will become filled quickly. To offset the demand, a new facility was completed Oct. 22, 2019. The new building has 56 new kennels, adding to the existing building’s 44 runs, for a total of 100. It makes Parker Kennels one of the largest, if not the largest, boarding facilities in the county. Parker credits the kennel’s success to the employees and the community’s support.

“I’ve got good employees, the girls work hard,” said Parker. “They’re dedicated, and they love animals. I grew up on a farm myself, so I’ve always been around animals, and it’s an enjoyable job. It’s nice to see the different dogs, each with their own personality, and most of the time they love seeing you too. I just enjoy doing this, it’s a lot of fun.”

The vets in the area send any overflow to Parker Kennels, especially during holidays. Along with the typical boarding, Parker Kennels employs two professional groomers who are onsite Monday through Friday. This, along with the staff’s love of animals and the low prices, keeps customers coming back.

“The customers are pleased with our work, and we keep our prices down. We’re one of the cheapest places in town.” Parker said. “I’ve al-

ways figured it was quantity versus price, because you can price yourself out of business very easily. We’ve only raised our rates here one time in all of the 21 years we’ve been in business. Even though our business has almost tripled our pricing remains the same.”

The kennels opened at \$12 per night, and now are only \$15 per night. For anyone who brings multiple pets to be boarded together, \$5 will be discounted from their total. Tourists who are staying in hotels that do not allow pets can leave them at Parker Kennels at night and pick them up during the day to take them along to the beach or to the park, and bring them back to the kennel before 5 p.m. Parker Kennels also offers \$8 daycare for pets, so owners don’t have to leave dogs in crates throughout the day while they work.

“We try here, we try really hard, and the good Lord has blessed us,” Parker said. “If it wasn’t for Him we wouldn’t be where we’re at. It’s good, and we love what we do.”

Parker Kennels is located at 12606 County Road 65 in Foley. You can reach them by calling 251-970-3647, visiting their website at [ParkerKennels.com](http://ParkerKennels.com), or check them out on Facebook. New customers are welcome daily.

*Ronnie Parker, owner*

**PARKER KENNELS**

**BOARDING & GROOMING**

12606 Co. Rd. 65, Foley, AL.

Phone: (251) 970-DOGS (3647)

[parkerkennel@yahoo.com](mailto:parkerkennel@yahoo.com)

Mon.-Fri. 7am-5pm • Sat. 7am-12pm & 3:30pm-4:30pm

Sun. 7am-8am & 4pm-5pm