

by Tara Poole

photo by Ken Krakow

Thinking Small in Big Ways

Up and down Sam Nunn Boulevard, downtown on Carroll Street, on street corners and in shopping centers and plazas all over town, small businesses are springing up all over Perry and with good reason. Perry has a lot to offer the small business entrepreneur—central location, family atmosphere and a community that encourages business development. It's the latter quality that truly makes the difference and is the reason why Perry recently earned designation as an "Entrepreneur Friendly" community by the Georgia Department of Economic Development Entrepreneur and Small Business Office.

To earn the designation of "Entrepreneur Friendly," a community must complete a multi-step program in which it demonstrates it is actively working to create an environment conducive to small business development and growth. Community leaders must also complete a two-day assessment by a review team and interview local entrepreneurs to evaluate the community's present environment for small business development.

"The Perry Area Chamber's Business Development Committee is thrilled with the news and tremendously pleased with the outcome," states Bob Largent, chair of the Business Development Committee. "It's been a true team effort, with the entire chamber and the greater Perry and Houston County business community working together. We knew we had an entrepreneurial-friendly community, but the data collected, the business survey results and the in-depth evaluation process validated that. In short, Perry and Houston County are extremely well prepared for and provide outstanding support for new entrepreneurial businesses. The future is very bright for business in Perry!"

Members of the Perry Area Chamber's Business Development Committee were the driving force behind Perry's earning the Entrepreneur Friendly designation. Working with local community organizations such as the City of Perry, the Perry Downtown Development Authority, the Houston County Development Authority and the Houston County Commission, the BDC devised and implemented several new programs and initiatives to encourage small business development and growth within the community. One such program is a series of business-oriented workshops geared towards educating the small business entrepreneur on topics such as marketing, interviewing and hiring, and team building. The BDC also created a guide book for potential

entrepreneurs on how to start a business in Perry and Houston County, which includes information on business planning, zoning, taxes and employees. This comprehensive guide will be readily available to individuals interested in starting a business in Perry as well as businesses looking to relocate to the area.

In addition to the guidebook, an Entrepreneurial Resource Center is being developed to help perspective business owners become familiar with the various resources available to them in the Perry community. "Located in the Perry Welcome Center, this resource center will consist of a computer, phone line, internet access and other office technology as well as reference books that the Chamber's BDC feels would be beneficial to those individuals interested in starting a business or who are in the process of starting one," explains Megan Smith, president of the Perry Area Chamber of Commerce. "Most of the time, small businesses that are just starting up don't have access to office equipment or space. People will be able to utilize this resource center to do research, conduct meetings and build a network of contacts through help from the Chamber." Smith



Members of the Perry Chamber of Commerce's Business Development Committee: (L-R) David Morgan, Rick Davis, Shannon Hargrove, Bob Largent, Karen Thompson, David Grossnickle, Megan Smith and Mike Baker.

agrees that Perry is on the fast track when it comes to fostering new businesses in the area. "Perry really is a friendly place. It's different from other small communities in that the people are so businesses-minded and friendly," Smith notes. "Small businesses actually seek out Perry to locate here. There truly is an entrepreneurial spirit to the community."