

## Chamber Happenings

By Catherine Dean

The Milledgeville-Baldwin Chamber of Commerce (MBCC) is celebrating its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year by continuing its efforts to strengthen the local economy and champion area businesses. The Chamber's theme for the year is "70 Strong in 17."

Chamber President and CEO Angie Martin was instrumental in securing an invitation for Milledgeville to participate in the GeorgiaForward's Young Gamechangers (YGC) program. The event will bring 50 young professionals, aged 24 to 40, from around the state who will recommend solutions for community challenges.

GeorgiaForward is a non-partisan, non-profit organization working to improve the state through cross-sector and statewide partnerships by engaging young professionals and businesses, as well as political, academic, and civic leaders.

"The Milledgeville YGC will consist of one-third from the local community, one-third from the Metro Atlanta area, and one-third from Greater Georgia," said Martin. "Applications are currently being accepted from around Georgia through GeorgiaForward."

Martin served as a participant in the YGC that covered Douglasville/Douglas County. "I witnessed, through participation in the program, how communities can benefit from different viewpoints," she said. "The young professionals who attend Gamechangers can bring innovative solutions to communities in need of fresh ideas."

After participants are selected, they will attend a meeting in Milledgeville this August to decide the four focus areas. Past focus areas have included education, transportation, and arts and culture. An overnight stay is planned for October which will include a four-hour bus tour of the entire city and county.

"The bus tour will include all of Milledgeville and Baldwin County," said Martin. "The group will be exposed to both the positive and negative aspects of our community. This is the only way to get an accurate picture of the needs that should be addressed."

The YGC will present the community a detailed report by the end of the year which will include a roadmap, budget, and other steps needed to go forward for improvement in the four focus areas. Other communities that have taken advantage of this enlightened program include Americus, Dublin, Augusta, and LaGrange.

The Chamber, along with GeorgiaForward, is offering sponsorship opportunities for the Milledgeville Young Gamechangers program. Martin noted that \$50,000 in cash and in-kind donations must be raised to support the expenses of the program.

"We are well on our way to reach the goal through securing donations of meeting spaces and other in-kind contributions," said Martin. "I know we can count on the city, county, businesses, and individuals to help us bring the Gamechangers program to our community."

Martin takes great pride in her staff and highlights Jennifer Baggarly, marketing and communications director, for being awarded a Regent Scholarship to attend the Institute for Organization Management-the professional development program of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

“Jennifer was one of only six people chosen in Georgia to attend the institute in Nashville in July,” added Martin. “We are so excited that she has been awarded this scholarship.”

The Regent Scholarship is given to professionals across the county and recognize each recipient for their involvement in industry professional organizations, community service, and professional background. While in attendance, Baggarly will have the opportunity to learn about emerging industry trends, how to expand the Chamber’s influence, and methods to grow their peer network.

Throughout the year, the Chamber’s theme “70 Strong in 17” will continue to be woven into events and publications. “I am excited about the theme and its logo that we created to show the strength and success of our local business community,” said Martin.

Martin emphasizes the need to acknowledge achievements of individual businesses-past and present. “In our spring issue of *MBCConnect*, we honored previous Small Business of the Year (SBOY) winners from the last 25 years,” she said. “We will name the 25<sup>th</sup> SBOY recipient at the annual Blue Sapphire Gala in June. It continues to be an exciting year to part of the Milledgeville/Baldwin business community.”