

Success stories through collaboration

It is the most wonderful time of the year. I hope everyone who reads this takes the time to truly celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace.

It is the time of year when the Chamber members must elect new directors to its board, and when it must ask most of its members to pay their dues for the next year.

It is the time of year when I cannot help but look back at our activities and contemplate our successes and disappointments. It is also the time of year when a big question always arises. What exactly is the Chamber of Commerce?

The Chamber is an independent corporation, not a government agency. It is a non-profit organization working on behalf of its dues-paying members—currently 22 stores, seven restaurants, 14 healthcare providers, six manufacturers, four banks, and 72 other businesses—that have voluntarily chosen to team up to create success stories through their collaborative efforts.

In 2009, the Chamber succeeded in its role as a catalyst for community action. With a paid staff of one, and a little more than 20 active volunteers whose work is spread throughout the year, the Chamber sponsored many worthwhile events and programs including the Christmas parade, the Admin Professionals Day Luncheon, the Sand Mountain Dessert Bake Off, a scholarship program, and more.

The Chamber succeeded as an information clearinghouse. It provided an information center that people called about events, directions, and business products and services. It also provided the town's official website which averaged 4,490 visitors a month during 2009.

As an advocate for its members, the Chamber did a pretty good job spreading the word about special merchant activities through various promotional efforts and its online business directory.

Since simply surviving another year in the current economic climate

was a success story all its own, I would like to salute all our local businesses for making it through 2009.

Looking ahead, there are tough challenges that are unique to the Rainsville business community. Conversely, there are opportunities that are equally unique. In 2010, the Chamber and its members should do all that can be done to identify the opportunities while helping sustain the town's economy and quality of life.

That means we need more concerned citizens to get involved through our board, committees, ambassador program, or simply through a low-cost membership investment.

If you would like to discuss the Chamber's role in the community, contact me at 638-7800 or timeberhart@farmerstel.com.