

New Big Bend Minority Chamber to serve 5-county region

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Attorney Sean Pittman, chairman of the Big Bend Minority Chamber of Commerce board, describes the organization's mission at a news conference today. Behind him are LaTanya White, left, of Creative Concept Group, chamber president Windell Paige, and vice chairman Lila Jaber, an attorney at the Gunster law firm. / Dave Hodges/Business Matters

Area business and civic leaders added another organization to the area roster today, officially announcing the formation of the Big Bend Minority Chamber of Commerce.

The new chamber plans an array of business support efforts, training, and networking opportunities across Leon, Jefferson, Gadsden, Wakulla and Franklin counties, said local attorney Sean Pittman, chairman of the chamber's board, during a news conference.

"We are here because we believe this chamber brings to the table best practices and approaches that we've seen collectively . . . seem very successful in other communities throughout this state and throughout this country," Pittman said.

“We believe the Big Bend area should play a more significant role, be a bigger player and a leader when it comes to minority businesses and woman-owned businesses and their growth,” he continued. “We are seeking to fill the void that we believe currently exists between minority businesses and the North Florida economic mainstream.”

The chamber intends to be a voice for its members, but also help them find avenues to become more involved in the procurement processes of potential customers.

The first corporate member of the Big Bend Minority Chamber is Capital Regional Medical Center. Brian Cook, president and CEO of the hospital, said his organization purchased \$1.5 million in medical and other supplies and services from minority business enterprises in 2011 and expects to spend as much this year.

“For us, assisting with emerging businesses makes great business sense,” Cook said. “It is very important for us as a large employer in the area to support that grassroots effort to maintain the successes of the minority businesses and continue to help the thriving, growing economy here locally.”

Windell Paige, the group’s president, noted that as small minority and woman-owned businesses succeed, other needs are met – among them more local employment, expanded vendor opportunities for those firms, and more economic development potential.

Previously, Paige was president of the Capital City Chamber of Commerce, but left that position last June 30. The Capital City Chamber is the business organization in Leon County devoted to the minority business community.

“Honestly, I think there’s room for any organization that has the goal of promoting and enhancing small businesses in any shape, form or fashion. Personally, I wish them the best in their goals and in their success. I really do,” said Terence Hinson, the Capital City Chamber’s chairman and acting president. “If they can benefit this community, if they can benefit small businesses and minority businesses, their existence is going to be a good thing.”