

GATEWAY NEWS



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A Partnership of Conecuh, Escambia & Monroe Counties

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Gordy Elected Vice Chairman of BCA

Carol Gordy of Brewton has been elected first vice chairman and chairman-elect of the Business Council of Alabama. She will take office as vice chair on Jan 1, 2006.

Gordy, who is the chairman and chief executive officer of Natural Decorations, Inc. (NDI) in Brewton, was elected at a board meeting on Dec 1 in Huntsville. She will be the first woman and the first CEO of a smaller business to hold this post.

"I was really very surprised to be elected," Gordy said, adding that in its 20-year history, the BCA has been led by CEOs of large corporations.

The BCA is a statewide business association representing the interests and concerns of almost 5,000 businesses and industries, which employ more than 750,000 Alabamians.

NDI has been a member of the Business Council for many years and Gordy has served on the 99-member board of directors for the past several years.

As vice chairman, Gordy will serve as president of Progress PAC, the BCA's political action committee. Progress PAC is one of the three top PACs in Alabama.

"We look for candidates who will support business," Gordy said. "BCA has really worked on issues like tort reform to give businesses a fair playing field in Alabama."

Businessmen and businesswomen representing companies in Alabama of all types and sizes serve on the Business Council's 99-member board of directors.

"We greatly appreciate these volunteer leaders who willingly give of their time and talents with the understanding that businesspeople must unite in support of policies that enhance the free enterprise system in Alabama," BCA President William Canary said.

Fast Facts

- Conecuh County was created by an act of the Alabama Territorial General Assembly on Feb 13, 1818. The name is derived from a Muskogee Indian word meaning "land of cane".
- In Escambia County, the county seat was originally located at Polard, but in 1880, it was transferred to Brewton, which was named in honor of William Troupe Brewton, a great-nephew of the first settler of the area.
- Monroe County is four years older than the state of Alabama. Claiborne was the first county seat. Today, Monroeville is the county seat and is best known as the home of Pulitzer Prize winning author Harper Lee and her childhood friend Truman Capote.

Alabama Unemployment Rate Drops

Alabama's unemployment rate of 3.6 percent in November was down from the 4.5 percent in October, and the lowest recorded since 1976.

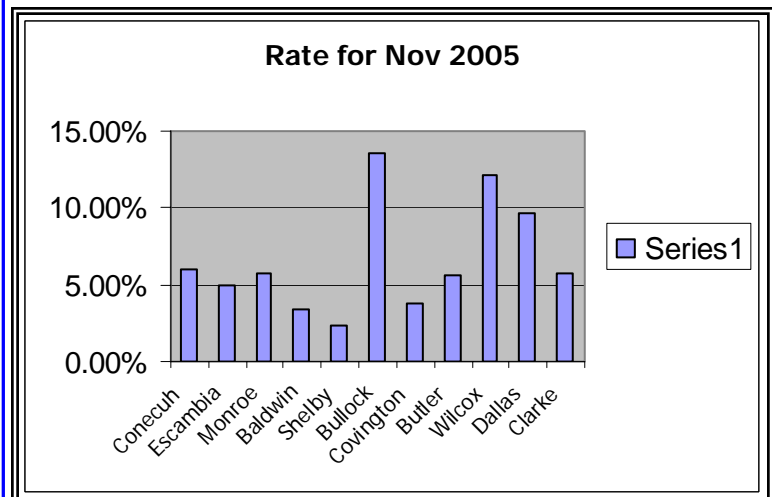
Alabama was ranked number 5 of the 50 states in November. We ranked number 35 this time last year.

"There's no question, there's no doubt, there's no debate: Alabama's economy is the best it's been in a long, long time," said Governor Bob Riley.

The November unemployment rate was far below the national rate of 5.0 percent.

Preliminary unemployment figures for Alabama counties show the lowest jobless rate was 2.3 percent in Shelby County and the highest rate was 13.6 percent in Bullock County.

The unemployment rate for Conecuh County is 6.0 percent, Escambia County is 5.0 percent and Monroe County is 5.7 percent. The Tri-County area is not the lowest rate but is well below the highest as you can see in the chart below.



Last November, Alabama's unemployment rate was 5.4 percent. In the past year, the number of employed Alabamians rose by nearly 48,000, according to the state Department of Industrial Relations.

"Since 2003, new and expanding businesses have announced more than 50,000 new jobs in our state. Our unemployment rate in 2005 dropped to its lowest level and has been consistently below the national average," Governor Riley said.

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Unemployment (continued)

"For the second straight year, we're going to have a net gain of jobs. Our workers and our economic development strategy are succeeding," Riley said. "Every county in our state saw a drop in unemployment in November."

Unemployment figures cannot be compared to data before 1976 because the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics compares data only back to that year.

Alabama On A Roll

- In May 2005, *Site Selection* magazine ranked the Alabama Development Office (ADO) as the number one economic development agency in America.
- *Southern Business and Development* magazine named Alabama "State of the Year" in both 2003 and 2004 for its economic growth.
- In 2004, *Plants, Sites and Parks* magazine ranked Alabama as one of the Top 10 states to locate a business.
- In 2004, Alabama Industrial Development Training, the state's workforce training program, was named the top workforce training program in the nation by *Expansion Management* magazine.
- 1,200 new and expanding industries since 2003
- More than 50,000 jobs created
- First NET GAIN IN JOBS since 2001
- Largest drop in unemployment of any state in the nation
- Median income and per capita income is up
- State ranked #1 in the nation for industrial diversity

CGEDA Assists Atmore IDB in Developing I-65 Business Park

The City of Atmore Industrial Development Board met December 14 for a one day lock-in to discuss the vision and strategies to develop the Atmore I-65 Business Park.

The goal of the meeting was to get a consensus from the board on a clear vision for the business park, determine action steps to fulfill the vision and a tentative timetable to realize the vision.

In November *CGEDA*, Atmore IDB, Escambia County IDA and Mayor Shell and his council toured Auburn, Opelika and Alexander City Business Parks to learn what other local leaders are doing in their parks.

"Each visit was very informative and has helped the board in formulating a timetable of the actions that need to be accomplished in the near future," said Marshall Rogers, Executive Director of Escambia County IDA. "We are pleased and excited to be part of this process."

Coastal Gateway EDA is assisting Atmore IDB with the business park project. Currently both groups are reviewing covenants of premier business parks in Alabama to develop covenants for the Atmore park.

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This is being done to ensure that the park will suit the needs of businesses considering moving there and ensure that the park makes a good first impression for the city of Atmore and Escambia County.

A covenant can allow the developer to exclude certain types of industries from locating in the business park and set the standard for the types of building materials used, general landscaping, location of loading docks, signage, etc. Covenants promote uniformity and set a minimum of standards for business parks.

Hotel Issues in Brewton Addressed

The owners of Days Inn of Brewton and the Brewton Inn met with a group of city, county and business leaders November 30 to tell them that they're working to improve hospitality services for their hotels.

Rayman, Sarju and Dipan Patel, owners of the Brewton Days Inn and Brewton Inn, delivered their message in a lunch meeting at the Brewton Inn.

Yank Lovelace, chairman of a subcommittee on regional and community development for CGEDA, called the meeting to discuss how important hospitality and good facilities are to economic development. Lovelace said he has heard complaints about the local motels, but he praised the Patels for their cooperative spirit and desire to improve local service.

Several years ago, the Patels purchased the former Brewton Motor Inn. "When we bought it, it was 20 to 25 years old," Sarju Patel said. "When we bought it we knew the condition it was in."

Ms. Patel said that the guest rooms are being outfitted with new furniture, refrigerators, coffee pots, microwaves, irons and ironing boards and wireless internet access. "The exterior entrances to the Brewton Inn will be accessible only with guest keys during evening hours," she said.

The Patels are former residents of Brewton and now reside in Mobile. They also own Days Inn of Atmore; La Quinta Inn, Moss Point, Miss; Hampton Inn, Mobile; Hampton Inn, Saraland; and Ramada Inn, Mobile.

Lovelace said the Patels have been receptive to input about the Brewton Inn and have shown a willingness to work with city leaders.

Industry Retention Program

Executive Director of Escambia County IDA, Marshall Rogers will be alongside *CGEDA* President, Wiley Blankenship in January to begin interviews in Escambia County for the Industry Retention Program.

Monroe County industries should also expect calls in January to meet with Blankenship and Monroeville Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, Sandy Smith.

The program is designed to assess the needs of existing industries and discover common trends among them. It will help *CGEDA* understand where assistance and improvement is needed.

These meetings are an excellent opportunity for industry executives to meet their local and regional economic developers.

Point to Ponder



A boat doesn't go forward if each one
is rowing their own way.