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Audie Adkins, president, Frisco Chamber of Commerce  
photo by Brent Earles

# FRISCO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE NURTURING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

BY LAUREN L. BECHEN

WITH THE CITY'S POPULATION PROJECTED TO DOUBLE EVERY FIVE YEARS, FRISCO IS BOOMING AND SO IS BUSINESS. The Frisco Chamber of Commerce is working to ensure that businesses, and their employees, stay an active part of the community.

"Growth in the community has given businesses more opportunities as more people want to stay closer to home. The Chamber's mission is to enhance Frisco's quality of life by welcoming, uniting and promoting business," states Chamber President Audie Adkins.

The Frisco Chamber of Commerce has approximately 1,200 business members that represent 17,000 to 18,000 employees. The Chamber hosts welcome fairs and ribbon cuttings to introduce new businesses into the community. It also provides collateral materials to companies and their employees - from tax

sheets to local resource guides that include information about parks and local school districts.

"We do all the things to make them feel welcome," says Adkins. "We want them to feel they are part of the community."

The Chamber's business retention efforts also include conducting business surveys and responding to requests for information. "We make sure businesses are satisfied with what's going on in Frisco and whether they have any concerns," Adkins states, noting that companies are directed to the proper officials, when necessary. In addition, information collected from surveys is communicated to various city departments on a monthly basis. "We give businesses an avenue to connect with someone they can actually talk to, such as city planning, code enforcement or city engineering."

"The growth of Frisco has been good for existing businesses, as well as attracting new ones, which helps fuel the city's continued growth," says Steve Lay, chairman of the Chamber's board of directors.

And, more businesses mean more jobs. According to Lay, the number of jobs has steadily increased within the City of Frisco over the last couple of years. When layoffs became the norm in the early part of the millennium, many Frisco residents looked at it as an opportunity to start businesses.

"While we lost some good citizens because they had to move in order to find jobs, many other people got really creative and developed businesses," states Adkins, noting that the Chamber's web site designer, DellaMark Web Technologies, is one such example. "The 30-somethings, which is the average age here, really want to stay in Frisco."

Rapid growth comes at a price, however. Traffic on local roads has increased. And certain services, such as the post office, are becoming overwhelmed with the increase in population.

"Most concerns are related to infrastructure, such as roads and schools," states Lay. "The Mayor, city council and city manager are doing an excellent job, however, of anticipating and

"The growth of Frisco has *been good* for *existing businesses* as well as *attracting new ones.*"

*Frisco Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards Banquet*



*Small Business of the Year Barry Farris, QwikWash America! with Betty Mahan  
photo courtesy of Frisco Chamber of Commerce*



*Golden Eagle Award Don & Jeanne Hermonat  
photo courtesy of Frisco Chamber of Commerce*



*Citizen of the Year Tony Felker with Libby Maus  
photo courtesy of Frisco Chamber of Commerce*

preparing for the concerns associated with rapid growth.”

In addition to its retention efforts, the Chamber serves as an advocate. The government affairs committee is responsible for getting the word out about legislative issues that may impact business. “A lot of small and medium sized businesses don’t have the time to keep up with issues. We try to keep them informed,” says Adkins.

The Chamber helped get Frisco’s beer and wine initiative started, showing people how the sales tax rebate would help develop other city projects. Another recent issue was the “no fax” law, which would have gone into effect last August with the national No Call List.

“The Public Utility Commission was going to require businesses to have written, signed approval from customers before they could send a fax,” Adkins explains. “It would have been detrimental to some of the smaller businesses, especially real estate agents, title companies and bankers. We were able to get enough people to contact their legislators so that they declined to put that law into effect until January 2005.”

The Chamber’s goal for the future is to become an even stronger advocate. “We’re making sure that’s where our real forte is—to be an advocate for the business community on local, state and federal levels,” states Adkins.

It also plans to work more closely with other chambers in nearby communities, such as McKinney, Allen and Plano, to discuss regional issues.

“We may have 1,200 members. Plano may have 2,200 and Allen, 700,” says Adkins. “When you add those all together into one collective voice, your legislators have the power behind them to vote on important issues, such as school finance, clean air and transportation. Those are the issues that are going to be with us for a long time.”

**MEET AND GREET OPPORTUNITIES**

Perhaps one of the Chamber’s most important aspects is the opportunity for local business owners to meet. For 2004, the Chamber plans to host several business retention lunches, monthly after-hours networking sessions and a welcome breakfast for new teachers. The Chamber also holds a 7:46 a.m. networking session every Thursday at its offices. For \$1, business owners get to share coffee and donuts, as well as the opportunity to make contacts.

Vince Brewer is one business owner who has taken advantage of the Chamber’s numerous networking opportunities. Brewer was working as an engineer with Frito-Lay when he started his electrical contracting business, Frisco Electric Inc., as a part-time venture in March 2002. He quit his job at Frito-Lay in September 2003 to take the business full time, but he initially had trouble getting the business off the ground.

“You have to figure out whom to talk to in order to get business,” he states. “I really struggled with that at first. Finally, other people in town told me to join the Chamber.”

Brewer joined the Chamber in October 2003. Within two months, he made the advertising contacts and generated the word of mouth he needed. “My business really blossomed. The support I’ve gotten has been amazing. It really helped turn my business around.” He advises, “You might be able to survive without the Chamber, but you’ll do a lot better with it.”

Stacey Wetzel agrees. “The people you meet (at Chamber events) can go out into the community and recommend you,” she says.

*Silver Citizen Award S. W. Christie and family with Polly Tadlock  
photo courtesy of Frisco Chamber of Commerce*



*Spirit of Frisco Award Sara Kimmich with Bob & Ann Warren  
photo courtesy of Frisco Chamber of Commerce*



*Large Business of the Year Larry Harris and Patricia Meadows, Hall Financial Group with Betty Mahan  
photo courtesy of Frisco Chamber of Commerce*



*Betty Mahan, 2003 Chamber Board President passing gavel to Steve Lay, 2004 Chamber Board President  
photo courtesy of Frisco Chamber of Commerce*



Owner of Quick-Cater, which serves food from local restaurants to residential and corporate events, Wetzel joined the Chamber two years ago. "I joined before I made a single dollar," she says. "I'm not really a business woman; I had no idea how to market my company. The Chamber allowed me to make connections with people who know more about the business aspects."

In addition, the Chamber helped Wetzel by hiring her to provide the food for some of its events. Says Wetzel, "The staff goes above and beyond to help promote your business."

Another one of her first customers was Barry Farris of QwikWash America!, a one-stop custom car care service located on Preston Road across from the Stonebriar Centre. "When I need services, I look in the Chamber first," says Farris. "We become better community citizens when we all try to help each other succeed."

A member since 2001, Farris views the contacts he makes at Chamber events as extensions of his own company. "They act as ambassadors all over town to try to get the word out about your business."

Farris returns the favor by participating in the Chamber's Ambassador Council. The public relations arm of the Chamber, ambassadors help create awareness of Chamber benefits. They represent the organization at ribbon cuttings, grand openings, open houses and other Chamber events.

"When we have ribbon cuttings, you'll see 40 to 50 ambassadors there," states Farris, who was recently honored by the Chamber with its 2003 Small Business of the Year award for his active community involvement and excellent business practices. "New businesses aren't guaranteed to succeed, but when you see that kind of support, it's a really good feeling. It helps businesses feel that they're in the right place."

Farris views the Chamber and its members as one big happy family. "I've never been involved in a chamber that's been this dynamic," he says. "It's an open environment. People seem really glad you're there."

He adds, "The Chamber is very beneficial in terms of meeting the right people. If you get really involved, you'll get a lot out of it."

Business memberships in the Frisco Chamber of Commerce start at \$250. For more information, contact the Chamber at 972-335-9522.

*Lauren L. Bechen is a freelance writer living in Frisco.*