

Northeast Area Council gives voice to small businesses

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Jay Wedeking has seen an exponential return on his investment since joining the Northeast Area Council of the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce.

He regularly attends the council's monthly Sunrise and After Hours meetings because of the "tremendous" networking opportunities.

"Our membership paid for itself a long time ago," said Wedeking, whose Soho Hero business at the Village at Sandhill provides services such as copying, printing and shipping.

"I joined on a Monday, Tuesday I went to After Hours and got three clients that day — one is now my second-largest customer."

Since launching in 2005, the Northeast Area Council not only has provided networking opportunities but a forum for businesses to come together to talk about issues important to them.

Northeast has been among the fastest-growing areas of the county for new retail. According to Richland County, there are more than 5,070 active businesses in six Northeast area ZIP codes.

Members of the council, a branch of the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce, come mostly from Northeast Richland. But meetings often draw attendees from as far away as Ridgeway, Elgin and even Irmo.

The council created four new committees in October to increase its effectiveness, including a marketing committee that sponsored carriage rides at the Village at Sandhill during the holidays, as well as fundraising, membership and speaker portfolio committees.



Jack Hatfield listens to a speaker at a sunrise breakfast at WildeWood Country Club.

3 QUESTIONS

With Martha Scott Smith, who was named last fall as the new chairwoman of the Northeast Area Council of the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce:

Why did you want to be chairwoman? I've always been involved in the Chamber of Commerce and live in the Northeast, which is one of the fastest-growing communities, and there are lots of opportunities to make a difference.

What does the Northeast Council provide for businesses? It provides a forum for small businesses and large businesses. There is an educational component. Stakeholders come together with input and issues and have a voice they carry forward.

What else would you like to see the Chamber provide the community? I'd like to see growth in terms of diversity and the services we offer.

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