



ALABAMA OUTREACH

A Newsletter of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network

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A Message from Interim President Mason



Interim Pres. Barry Mason

I am pleased with the continuing work the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network is doing to extend the

business resources available in Alabama's Black Belt communities. The additional resources being offered by the Angelo Bruno Business Library are only the most recent example of the value this Network can bring to these communities and the entrepreneurs who reside throughout Alabama.

As longtime Dean of the Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration, I understand the importance of helping grow business in Alabama. So I am especially grateful for the work of the AERN partners in each of our Network agencies. We look forward to a continuing relationship with these organizations as we work together to grow business in the Black Belt and beyond.

Barry Mason
Interim President
The University of Alabama

University Business Library Joins Forces with AERN

The Angelo Bruno Business Library at the University of Alabama is a new collaborator with the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network. The Library staff has developed a web site (<http://aern.cba.ua.edu> – See p. 3 for details) and is working on other ways to make business information more accessible to entrepreneurs in Alabama.

Lee Pike, Head of the Bruno Business Library, said the goal of the library staff is to make information easy to find and use. "We are developing guides to using business information such as online databases," Pike said. These guides should also help in interpreting the content of some of the resources at each AERN site, according to Pike. The guides will be documents accessible and printable from the web site. Interested business people can print and use the documents to access databases as varied as Google (a generic search engine) and the Alabama Virtual Library.

Pike believes one of the electronic resources that should be especially useful to entrepreneurs is the Alabama Virtual Library. The virtual library includes databases such as Business Source Elite, which contains texts of articles from close to 2,000 business periodicals, ranging from popular business journals to trade magazines to academic periodicals. "If you are interested in forest product news or the sporting goods industry, for example, you can find articles from trade magazines in those fields on the Business Source Elite database," Pike said.

Karen Chapman, Paul Brothers and Todd Hines, business reference librarians at Bruno Business Library, also are involved in the project. Chapman has worked with entrepreneurs in the past. She has often led sessions on accessing business reference material during Small



Angelo Bruno Business Library

Business Basics classes taught by Paavo Hanninen, co-director of AERN.

Chapman is developing the AERN library web site. Among its functions is an "Ask a Business Librarian" e-mail option. Chapman expects questions such as "Who are my competitors in this area?" and "How should I decide where to advertise?" "We'll forward questions to other experts, if necessary," she said. The library enlists the resources of various professional groups such as the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). The e-mail question feature is designed to have an answer to entrepreneurs within two business days. "In most cases we should be able to send the data they're asking for by e-mail," Chapman said.

Pike said librarians anticipate making visits to AERN sites during the winter and spring to train local staff members in the use of the AERN web site and various business databases.

Most resources of the Bruno Business Library are available to any Alabama resident. The library staff welcomes walk-in community patrons as well as their traditional student and faculty clientele. They hope that by joining forces with AERN they will be able to better serve current business people and those interested in establishing and running a small business in Alabama.

Demopolis Chamber of Commerce Finds AERN Tools Invaluable

Kathy Leverett, executive director of the Demopolis Chamber of Commerce, a charter AERN member institution, says that the value of the AERN centers is far-reaching. She suggests that the resources placed at the AERN partner sites can be used creatively to support business and entrepreneurial work in rural Alabama counties.

The computer resources allow preparation of professional looking presentations and updating of Internet information, she said. "For the first time we have a Powerpoint presentation to show business prospects who come to Demopolis," Leverett said. "We can now take prospects on a virtual tour of Demopolis through our computer presentation. These are tools we have to have to grow business."

Leverett reported that recently the Demopolis Chamber has hosted businesses looking to locate in Marengo County. Courting prospective business is competitive and she believes the professional presentations that the Demopolis Chamber and other AERN members are now able to prepare give them a competitive edge.

"We need to change the image of these rural communities," Leverett said. "The University of Alabama has done a great deal for these small areas. Other areas know what is out there and companies may have all the technology they need. Having up-to-date computer resources helps change our image. I think this really highlights how far-reaching an impact this program can make for its members."

In addition to software programs such as Powerpoint, Leverett says the ability to regularly update Demopolis' web site is a value in recruiting businesses.



Demopolis Chamber of Commerce and AERN staff

Previously the Demopolis Chamber paid to have its web site updated. They would let necessary changes accumulate and have the site updated once a year or so. "We have never been able to change our own web site. Now we can update it ourselves," she said.

She noted that the resources at the Demopolis Network center are used on a daily basis and they can be similarly useful at each member site. "This makes every AERN chamber or industrial development organization look like they have their act together," Leverett said.

"I cannot thank the University of Alabama enough for this opportunity," Leverett said.

Top Five Ways Business People Can Use the Network

1. The Business Plans Handbook: This collection of real business plans might serve as a template for your own business plan. Information on what topics to research, the financial detail needed for a business plan, and business descriptions can help as you write and assess your own plan.

2. Small Business Profiles: This contains general information regarding business start-up issues such as costs and profits, financing, marketing, advertising, location, licenses, insurance, and staffing. It provides a point of comparison while developing a business plan.

3. The Encyclopedia of Associations: This compilation of 22,000 industry, business and non-profit associations can be used to identify industry meetings,

experts and advertising possibilities. It also is helpful in networking with regional industry leaders.

4. Demographic Information: This information is available on CD-ROM, in print and via the Internet. It can assist you in determining whether your business's target audience exists in numbers that would make the business viable in your area.

5. Internet: Each AERN site has a computer and Internet access. There are any number of web sites that can help in business development. Some of these web sites are highlighted in previous editions of Alabama Outreach (available in the Other Publications section of <http://cber.cba.ua.edu>).

New Web Site Offers Business Resources

Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network members have a new weapon in their research arsenal. The staff of the Angelo Bruno Business Library at the University of Alabama has made a wealth of business information available at a new web site – <http://aern.cba.ua.edu/>.

The AERN/Bruno Business Library web site provides a range of information – from basic news about AERN, its members and University of Alabama staff, to free downloadable software to assist in business research.

Karen Chapman, business reference librarian at Bruno Business Library, believes the “Ask a Business Librarian” feature should be of special use to entrepreneurs in rural Alabama counties. By filling out a form on the web site, entrepreneurs can have their business research questions answered by business research experts at the Library. Chapman said that librarians will attempt to reply to e-mail questions within two business days.

The librarians also have created guides on how to use the Alabama Virtual Library and the Business Source Elite database of almost 2,000 business publications. These guides are available at the AERN web site. The guides can be printed and used as a desk reference for Alabama entrepreneurs as they do computer research. The guides provide step-by-step instructions through these two valuable resources. The Alabama Virtual Library is available to all Alabama citizens, however, access to the Virtual Library does require an identification number, which is available free of charge at your local public library.

In addition to these AERN-specific resources the web site provides links to several other business sites. There are links to the Small Business Administration home page, the National Federation of Independent



To view this site go to: <http://aern.cba.ua.edu>

Business, and the Small Business Advisor. There also are several links to sites related to tax issues, including the IRS - Tax Information for Small Businesses and Alabama Department of Revenue sites.

Finally, the web site provides free downloadable software. The software allows you to view and print documents (Adobe Acrobat Reader or Word 97/2000 viewer) and access the Internet (Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape Web browser).

Lee Pike, Head of the Bruno Business Library, said the goal of the business library staff is to make information readily available to Alabama entrepreneurs, wherever they reside.

The addition of the Bruno Business Library staff to the AERN University of Alabama team will prove to be an invaluable resource to Network members and small business people throughout Alabama.



Screen shots from the AERN Website



Screen shots from the AERN Website

A Newsletter of the
Alabama Entrepreneurial
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