

ALABAMA OUTREACH

A Newsletter of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network

Volume 4 Number 1

Winter/Spring 2004

Partners Get Refresher Course

University of Alabama staff traveled to the Demopolis Area Chamber of Commerce on March 10 to present a refresher course for local Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network staff members.

Paul Brothers and Todd Hines, research librarians at UA's Angelo Bruno Business Library, reintroduced AERN staff partners to the reference materials, computer software and online resources that are available at each AERN site.

Paavo Hanninen and Annette Watters, codirectors of the AERN, updated attendees on current activities of the Network.

Hanninen and Watters have been writing grants and working to develop additional sources of funding for AERN. New staff members of partner organizations were introduced.

"We needed to provide training for new staff at the Demopolis Chamber, so we decided to invite the staff from other organizations to come for a refresher course," Hanninen said.

In attendance were representatives of the Perry County Chamber of Commerce, the Selma-Dallas County Chamber of Commerce, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission, Demopolis, Greene Co., and HERO.



Smokin' Jack's business built with help from AERN

After eight years working in shipping and receiving at Gulf States, Jacky Poole of Demopolis decided he wanted to share his talent for making barbecue.

He loves to cook, as can be seen when he's working the pit at his new restaurant, Smokin' Jack's. Poole opened Smokin' Jack's on January 19, 2004. He had developed a specialty in barbecued ribs. "I thought I could be successful in the restaurant business," Poole said.

But before Poole put together his business proposal, got a small business loan or built his new building, he turned to the Demopolis Area Chamber of Commerce and the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network for help. The Chamber and AERN helped by providing data necessary for completing the SBA (Small Business Administration) loan application.

"For anybody starting up a business they have everything you need to know," Poole said. "They had information about the number of cars that drive by my place, the number of people and the number of restaurants around here. Having so much detail in my business proposal, I think that's what helped me get my loan."

Poole is happy with the response to his restaurant. "Business has been good. We've been busy." He notes that his business is exceeding projections. "I would send any potential business person to the Chamber," Poole said. "I have a friend who is trying to start a business. He says he wants to start small and build the business slowly. I told him to use the



Smokin' Jack's opened in Demopolis in January. The barbecue restaurant used AERN to help develop its business

AERN materials at the Chamber to know how to expand his business."

Smokin' Jack's is located at 1023 Highway 80 West, in Demopolis, and is open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Monday through Saturday. The telephone number is (334) 287-0675.



Jacky Poole constructed a new building for his restaurant at a location he confirmed was desirable based on research using AERN resources.

Demopolis incorporates AERN into new program

As one of founding partners of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network, the Demopolis Area Chamber of Commerce keeps searching for innovative uses of AERN resources. Recently, a new Chamber president has implemented an initiative that he hopes will extend AERN into untapped sectors of the local business environment.

Jay Shows was recently named president of the Demopolis Chamber and executive secretary of the Industrial Development Board. He noted that one sector of the Demopolis area business community that was not being sufficiently reached were African American business people. He wants to change that.

“We really want to get some emphasis on small business development,” he said. “We want to make these resources available to our local black business leaders and start-up minority business owners.”

Shows knows that being a small business owner is no easy task. He operated hotels in Demopolis and Birmingham. He had sold both businesses when the opportunity to serve Demopolis as Chamber president arose. “I have a small business background. I know how difficult it is to start and sustain a small business,” he said.

“We want to make these resources available to our local black business leaders and start-up minority business owners.”
-Jay Shows

While the population in Demopolis is predominantly African American, about 52 percent, according to Shows, only a small fraction of local business owners are black and most of them are not members of the Demopolis Chamber. Shows would like to see the Chamber help increase the visibility of African American business owners.

“We want to get some local black business owners together to help us come up with ideas about how we as a Chamber can best help with start-up and non-performance,” Shows said. “We have had the AERN books and computer system for two or three years, but we have not pushed it hard enough to this target market. We have not aggressively made that a real emphasis for our Chamber.”

To change that, Shows hosted an AERN refresher training seminar for members of the Network on March 10. He wants to make black business owners aware of the resources and prepare his staff to answer questions of business-people. “Most of our business people are receptive to talking with experts from The University of Alabama. We need to take advantage of those resources,” Shows said.

Shows is partnering with Lacornia Harris, of Kora’s Restaurant, and Chris Scott, an owner and operator of Larkin and Scott Funeral Home. Both businesses are in Demopolis. Harris and Scott are successful African American business

owners. Shows wants to get black business owners together once a month for breakfast. In such an informal setting, he hopes the business owners will share ideas about how the Chamber can help them and how they can help each other. Shows said the organization is named Minority Owners Succeeding Together (MOST) and had its first breakfast meeting on March 23.

“I’ll feel like we’ve been successful if we can get 10 to 12 people together each month,” Shows said. “We need to hear their ideas and suggestions. Maybe there can be some marketing that could be done collectively.”



Eddas King Easley (left), owner of Omnifarious, a Christian bookstore, and Suburban Tax, and Jay Shows, president of the Demopolis Area Chamber of Commerce, are working together to encourage business owners in Demopolis to make use of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network.

The resources of AERN are an integral part of this plan, he said. He has set a goal regarding individuals who use the services of AERN before the year’s end. “We’d like five success stories, whether it’s using the resources to improve struggling businesses or to help new start-ups,” Shows said. “We want to provide these business people with the nuts and bolts they need.”

Public training seminars planned for Selma, Demopolis

The Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network is planning two public seminars this spring. On April 13, a workshop will be at the Selma-Dallas County Chamber of Commerce. On May 12, AERN will hold a workshop at the Demopolis Area Chamber of Commerce. Registration begins at 1:00 p.m. on the day of the workshop; the session will convene at 1:30 p.m. Admission to the seminars is free, but seating is limited.

The seminars are designed to introduce current business owners or prospective entrepreneurs to the resources available through the AERN. Presenters will describe how AERN can help develop businesses in Dallas and Marengo counties.

Both the Selma-Dallas County and the Demopolis Area chambers of commerce contain computers, video, and print references for people who want to start or build a business. At the AERN research centers, people have access to a computer

work station, business planning software, online reference materials and printed business research materials. Faculty and staff at The University of Alabama Culverhouse College of Commerce selected the AERN research center resources.

The seminars will cover how to write a business plan, how to perform market research and how to gather pertinent demographic information. Participants will be introduced to online resources available via the AERN Web site (<http://aern.cba.ua.edu/>), including various business databases.

Seminar participants will receive a business packet including a list of useful Web sites, information about how to use the AERN, and other resources useful to small businesses.

To sign up for the Selma seminar, contact Claire Twardy (334/875-7241). To sign up for the Demopolis seminar, contact Jay Shows (334/289-0270).

AERN offers Internet search tips

Reference librarians at the Angelo Bruno Business Library, University of Alabama, offer Internet search tips on the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network Web site (<http://aern.cba.ua.edu/>).

Two useful Web resources for entrepreneurs are the Alabama Virtual Library (AVL) and Google. AVL is a collection of databases and Google is a Internet search engine. The AVL site provides all Alabama citizens a wealth of information. The AVL requires a password that is available to any Alabama citizen through their public library. The service is free. No library card is required in order to receive an AVL card. With your free password, AVL is available at <http://www.avl.lib.al.us/>. Once at the AVL Web site, users click "Home Access" at the top of the computer screen and then type in their last name and password. The next screen allows users to select a database by age category, subject category or specific name. The Bruno librarians suggest Business and Company Resource Center, Business Index ASAP, and Business Source Elite as particularly valuable databases.

The Google site provides access to the vast variety of information available on the Internet. A Google search begins at <http://www.google.com>. On the opening Google screen, there is a line that allows you to type in a specific topic. To receive the best information, your search should be specific. For example, a search for "Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network" will list the AERN Web site as your first option. By searching for "Entrepreneurial Research," the AERN Web site is preceded by many other Web sites.

The "Guides to Information Resources" section of the AERN Web site provides more detailed Internet research tips. Questions can also be addressed to University of Alabama business librarians via the Web site.



The AERN Members and their Contact Persons

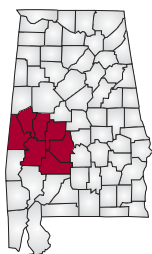
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