Jamie Wallace, executive director of the Selma-Dallas County Chamber of Commerce, believes the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network (AERN) site in Selma is providing a valuable service to Dallas County residents.

“We think that as the word has circulated more that the center is here, that we are getting more traffic,” Wallace said. Prospective and current business people are using the AERN site in Selma. People visiting the center at the Chamber of Commerce office are introduced to the variety of business research resources available. Most useful, so far, according to Wallace, have been printed materials. Chamber staff makes copies for researchers who can then take the material home to use or mull over. But Internet access, CD-ROM references, and videotapes also are available.

AERN benefits Selma and Dallas County in other ways. “It gives us a network of people throughout our area who have similar problems and assets,” Wallace said. “It provides a medium that we did not have in the past. It may have taken weeks to get information in the past.” Now, there is almost instant access to research on a variety of business issues.

Though the Selma center has only been fully operational since about January, it is already getting use. Wallace reports that between 12 and 15 people have seriously used the center and its resources. Some users are doing research about how to improve their existing business, but most are exploring new business options. New business ideas of AERN users in Selma have ranged from day care centers to restaurants to retail.

While some have used the center to develop business plans, there are no new businesses up and running. Wallace blames the current economy, but believes there will be new business starts developed with help from AERN resources. He believes the center also provides a valuable service when it offers information that discourages a lackluster business idea. “There are some who do research and learn that it’s better not to go into business. It’s better to do the research and decide not to go into business than to go into a business that’s designed to fail from the start,” Wallace said.

The AERN research center is located in the Selma-Dallas County Chamber of Commerce office at 513 Lauderdale Street in Selma. For information about the Selma AERN site call: (334) 875-7241 or e-mail: selmacofc@us.inter.net.

The AERN Members and their Contact Persons

- Bibb County Chamber of Commerce: Ms. Carla Stallings (205) 926-5222
- Perry County Chamber of Commerce: Ms. Diane Harrison (334) 683-9622
- Sumter County Industrial Development Authority: Ms. Felicia Jones (205) 652-9303
- Greene County Industrial Development Board: Ms. Phillis Belcher (205) 372-9763
- HERO (Hale County): Mr. Jim Kellen (334) 624-9100
- Demopolis Area Chamber of Commerce: Ms. Kathy Leverett (334) 289-0270
- Selma Area Chamber of Commerce: Mr. Jamie Wallace (334) 875-7241
- Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission: Ms. Ann Alford or Ms. Robin Crawford (334) 682-4234

*Center for Business and Economic Research, Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration, The University of Alabama*
What Does it Take to be an Entrepreneur?

Successful entrepreneurs have some common characteristics, according to Paavo Hanninen, co-director of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network.

- **Entrepreneurs have perseverance or stick-to-it-ness.** It takes time and patience to grow a successful business. Entrepreneurs who thrive are focused on the goal and do not waver.

- **Entrepreneurs have experience or background in the business they are starting.** They have industry knowledge. A recent visitor to Hanninen’s office announced he had given up on a two-year business venture producing packaged food products in favor of starting a support service for gas and oil field operations. While the packaged food business did not fail, it did not flourish either. After six months in the gas and oil business, the entrepreneur announced he had made more profit than in two years in his previous venture. The difference? He worked in the gas and oil business before he started his food business. He has industry knowledge of his new business.

- **Entrepreneurs have advisors.** Most successful entrepreneurs don’t go it alone. They have a team. Entrepreneurs need a good banker who can review and provide insight about business plans. They need a good accountant. And they need reliable legal advice.

- **Successful entrepreneurs work from a business plan.** Be sure to write and revise your business plan as needed, and rely on it like a road map. A good business plan can keep you focused on the destination and provide the information necessary for making it to that destination.

AERN Resources Aid in Business Planning

Each Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network (AERN) site provides a wealth of business research resources. The resources are selected based on their usefulness to small business owners or budding entrepreneurs. Most are non-technical and very user friendly.

A prospective business owner could find the AERN centers useful in a variety of ways. They may find background information on industry standards in their field of interest. General keys to starting a business as well as hints about starting a particular type of business also are available in the centers. With a little research using the resources provided by AERN, entrepreneurs can find cost to sales, margin to sales and net profit averages for the industry of interest. They also may find information on associations related to their business idea.

After doing some exploratory research about the industry, entrepreneurs can begin planning their own business using AERN resources. There are sample business plans available at each site. Demographic information – population, income levels, etc. – is available on CD-ROM and in print to help discern whether a business idea is really feasible for your area and to aid in your planning. There also is business planning software to make writing your plan easier.

Finally, AERN center users can get basic help from local staff members as well as AERN staff at the University of Alabama Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration.
Local, state and University of Alabama officials joined in celebrating the grand openings of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network’s (AERN) seventh and eighth locations in May. On May 31, Bibb County’s site was opened in the Bibb County Chamber of Commerce offices in Centreville. On May 10, a new location was opened at the Perry County Chamber of Commerce offices in Marion.

Carla Stallings, director of the Bibb County Chamber of Commerce, said she was pleased with the grand opening and ribbon cutting at her location. The Bibb County chamber treated guests to a picnic luncheon of grilled hot dogs, chips and dessert. Stallings said that 25 to 30 people were in attendance.

Diane Harrison, Perry County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, estimated 35 to 40 people attended the Perry County grand opening. Marion Mayor Edward Daniel, UA President Andrew Sorensen, bank representatives, chamber board members and community people were all present at the Perry County opening, according to Harrison.

“Promoting small business development,” said University of Alabama President Andrew Sorensen, “is the key to any true economic development. The approach also allows The University of Alabama to be a true partner in this effort to ensure that all Alabamians are provided the tools they need to improve the quality of life for the citizens in their respective counties.” Sorensen was among the speakers at the Perry County grand opening.

Harrison said that one person has already used the research center in Perry County several times. She said he was very impressed with the computer resources available for researching his business idea.

The Network offices in Perry and Bibb counties provide area residents and business people access to business research and planning resources. The Perry County office is at 1200 Washington Street in Marion. The Bibb County office is located at 835 Walnut Street in Centreville. Both AERN centers are open during the regular chamber business hours.

I am grateful that Perry County has been added to the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network (AERN).

This program is going to open up opportunities to people in Marion and Perry County who have entrepreneurial ideas. A high-tech program like this can connect our rural community with resources that would not normally be available in Marion or Perry County. That is the biggest advantage of this program. Information that was previously not available in Marion can now be accessed through the Internet. This connects our local entrepreneurs with useful reference and planning material from across the nation and around the world.

The grand opening of our center was a success. A good cross section of the Marion community was represented at the opening of the Perry County AERN center. We were especially pleased that President Sorensen was here for the event. We appreciate this partnership between the Perry County Chamber of Commerce and the University of Alabama.

- Mayor Edward Daniel
Marion, Alabama

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Training Seminars Scheduled

Three staff training seminars are scheduled for July and August in Bibb, Perry, and Wilcox counties.

Representatives from the University of Alabama Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration will provide training for staffs at the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network (AERN) centers in these three counties. This training will acquaint staff with the resources provided by the Network. Following training, staff members should be able to more fully assist business people and entrepreneurs in their research.

Learn More at Our Website

Log on to http://cber.cba.ua.edu for more Alabama business information and data. The Center for Business and Economic Research at the Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration at the University of Alabama maintains this website. Here you will find Alabama state data, economic forecasting and analysis, research summaries, and publications related to business interests specific to Alabama. You can also find past issues of Alabama Outreach in the “Other Publications” section of this website.

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