There are 2 chambers

Black Chamber of Commerce focuses on small businesses

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Their goal is similar, but their target and method differ.

Although Lafayette already had a chamber of commerce, a few locals felt a different focus was needed.

With this in mind, Je’Nelle Chargois, Bishop Roy Winbush and Sen. Don Cravins formed the Greater Southwest Louisiana Black Chamber of Commerce about six years ago.

“For several years on my radio talk show, we had been having a discussion about economic development and the need for small businesses to come together and discuss their difficulties and successes,” said Chargois, with KJCB radio and president of the local chapter of the NAACP.

Out of this need, the Black Chamber of Commerce was started with an early membership of about 100.

Although its membership has declined, now at 75, the Black Chamber is helping to eliminate inequities in business, Chargois said.

“Our major focus and our major goal is education and that of information, to inform and disseminate information to minority businesses,” said Eric Singleton, president of the Greater Southwest Louisiana Black Chamber of Commerce.

Annual banquet to be held Friday

The Greater Southwest Louisiana Black Chamber of Commerce will hold its annual banquet at 7 p.m. Friday at the Martin Luther King Center, 309 Cora St., Lafayette.

Guest speaker for the event will be Michael J. Olivier, secretary of the Louisiana Department of Economic Development, who will speak on resources and opportunities available to minority businesses and entrepreneurs.

The evening will also feature installation of officers and presentation of the Trail Blazer Awards.

The group will honor five people with the award, which honors local businesses and individuals who have achieved success themselves or have helped others to succeed. This is the first year the Trail Blazer Awards are being presented.

Trail Blazers will be presented to Sen. Don Cravins, Je’Nelle Chargois, Clement Amos, Ronald Babineaux and Dr. Ernest Kinchen. Siemco is the corporate sponsor for the event.

Tickets cost $25 and are on sale through March 16. Call 335-1193 or 593-1400.

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the group.

Singleton became a member of the volunteer-run organization about four years because he was interested in seeing the growth and quality of business in the area.

The group the Black Chamber is trying to reach is small, minority-owned companies, he said.

The mission of the group, which is a branch of the National Black Chamber of Commerce Inc., is to economically empower and sustain African-American communities through entrepreneurship, enrichment, and capitalism activity in the Americas. The organization was founded by Virginia Jones, Chamber secretary.

To accomplish this goal, training sessions are held, members share their knowledge, a business expo was held promoting minority businesses and members are informed of other learning opportunities, such as events held by the Lafayette Economic Development Authority or the Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce.

The Black Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce don't compete, said Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce Chairman Tyrone Pickard. In fact, it's two groups that are involved in both groups, he said.

"The mission of the Black Chamber is much more focused on small business incubation," Pickard said. "That provides a great resource to the minority business community.

Clement Amos of Amos Lawn Service and Landscaping Inc., has been a member of the Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce for 20 years.

"It offers good communication and opportunities. A lot of businesses are available to local minority businesses," he said.

Pickard estimates 100 small businesses have been trained by the group in the past 10 years.

"They're a voice for small businesses," he said.

"I think the group provides an opportunity to create a dialogue with other businesses," Amos said.

"To the minority community basically we are the first generation of minority owners," she said. "It's important for us to network.

Business owners are not sitting in all of the information that they need, Jones said. By focusing on small businesses, the Black Chamber is able to help put information in.

"Most of the black businesses are mom-and-pop businesses. Most are just starting. Even the ones that have been in business a while feel like they're just starting," she said. "It's not an easy road.

Dianne Mouton Allen, of the National Coalition Building Institute's Lafayette chapter, said she hopes the Black Chamber is a networking vehicle.

"It's helping people to try to expand the business I currently have," she said.

Members also learn for one another.

Amos said he has helped young people and just starting out by sharing their business knowledge on issues like marketing to different customers.

"It's more than just trying to receive," he said.

Dee Williams, Amos said the group is not just for blacks.

"They're trying to focus on economics... to help people in general," he said. "You can see more people participate and see what we can offer.

Anyone can join, Jones said, "If you just need we need it most.

Some (African-American) seem to want about doing the other one. Some just didn't understand," she said.

Pickard said, "If you're trying to get information out it is a better way and that they will understand anyway.

"It's the groundwork started in the greater Lafayette chamber community but has expanded," Singleton said.

"We're trying to educate each other on how to do business with each other, to promote our businesses compelling," Singleton said. "We're not just trying to be exclusive. We're very much trying to help the small guys get going and stay in business.

Black Chamber members whoa common denominator that the current city administration and the current county administration, under City Council President Joe Dooley's leadership, is working on.

"We have been doing a lot of the groundwork to raise the employment rate of the black community," Jones said. "It's impact can only be posit..."