

# Entrepreneur®

## Helping entrepreneurs: The Chamber Small Business Advisory Council works to support Michigan's talent

By Mike Semanco | Detroit – September, 2008

**Resilient and persistent** are two words that I have used to describe the small business entrepreneurs of Southeastern Michigan. In an economic climate where challenges are more prevalent than opportunities, small business owners are faced with the weekly review of their business models making sure they stay one step ahead of the next disaster.

As a long standing member of the Chamber's Small Business Advisory Council and elected Chairman for the 2007-2008 program year, I have enjoyed working with the council team and listening to the needs of the businesses in the region. The individuals involved in the Business Advisory Council are entrepreneurs who have had a wealth of experiences and are no strangers to adversity, which lends a tremendous amount of value to our Chamber members.

This past year we have been faced with the ups and downs of the Michigan Business Tax and subsequent Service Tax. The Chamber and Council members collectively raised our voices to make our concerns known to the legislature in Lansing and continue to fight to make Michigan a business friendly state. We know it will be an arduous battle, but realize there are too many businesses negatively impacted by the new tax not to act. Another initiative on members' minds is having a business climate that is conducive to developing and retaining Michigan talent, creating workforce development initiatives to promote entrepreneurship, providing post-secondary education training and managing internship opportunities which will provide real life business experience at an earlier stage of a student's education track. The WIRED grant obtained by the Chamber will help accomplish some of these objectives. Through collaboration with local colleges and universities, the Chamber is focused on keeping more graduates in the Detroit Region after college.

We are also hearing loud and clear from those that have triumphed over challenges and are in a position to grow; how do they get there on a limited budget? Additions of new networking and marketing events are on the horizon and the ever popular 5-Minute Networking and Membership Maximizers continue to help members expand their resources and professional network. In addition to growing the top line, members have asked us to review cost saving programs. We are exploring ways to add new membership discount programs and create workshops that will provide insight on analyzing business income statements and saving

money in various categories like healthcare, marketing or employee training expenses.

As always, the Council has been very busy and as we progress through the remainder of the year, we will consistently look for ways to be more effective with programming and aligning our initiatives with the overall strategic plan of the Chamber. Stay focused on the business at hand and remain persistent.

The Small Business Conference is one of the ways the Chamber works to help local entrepreneurs. Held in October, the 2007 Small Business Conference brought together over 600 small business owners and managers. The conference's



theme, "It's not business as usual," reflected the challenging economic conditions faced by small businesses in the Detroit Region. Speakers included current Detroit Pistons President and local legend Joe Dumars (pictured here with conference speaker Paul Vitale), former Senior Editor for Fast Company and current CNN Correspondent Polly LaBarre and Consultant and Founder of Vitale Communications Paul Vitale. Session topics included marketing using new media, going global and innovation.

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