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CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

2023 EDITION ISSUE 2

MARCH/APRIL

Featuring

ANTHONY'S BRIDAL AND TUXEDO

THE NEWSLETTER

PROVIDING INFORMATION, SERVICES, LEADERSHIP AND VISION

P. O. Box 1117 | Foley, Alabama 36535 | 251.943.3291 | www.southbaldwinchamber.com

On The Cover

***Anthony's Bridal & Tuxedo** is now in its 35th year providing elegant and beautiful gowns for weddings, proms, pageants, and balls, exquisite jewelry and tiaras, handsome tuxedos, suits, and designer formal wear, all paired with shoes and accessories. At Anthony's there's something for every shape, size, and special occasion.*



How it all Began | Founded in 1988 by Anthony's mother, Ms. Jo Solorzano, and sister Theresa Gremling, generations of clients have traveled through their doors. The idea of a bridal boutique came from Jo. At the time she was a teacher at Foley High School and already familiar with proms and pageants. The parents of a few of her students suggested she look into opening a bridal shop. The closest place back then was about a forty-five minute drive.

As a single mother, Jo took a leap of faith, left her teaching career, and opened the shop with only four bridal gowns and nine bridesmaids' dresses. She named her new business after her son, Anthony. At only seven years old, Anthony worked helping out where he could spending many hours there after school and on weekends.

Looking Ahead to a Third Generation | Anthony and his wife Hope spent many years working at the shop and ultimately bought the business in June 2020. Although Hope works full-time for the Baldwin County Board of Education, she spends time after school at the shop purchasing gowns and apparel and assisting clients. Their son, Trevior also spends time there working when he isn't in class at Snook Christian Academy or busy playing sports.

"This will be Trevior's one day. We are so proud to be able to say that we are a 'generational' business in Baldwin County. We've been through good years and bad as most small businesses have. We've even had to relocate the entire shop's inventory because of hurricane damage," explained Anthony. "Hope and I are truly thankful for the community's support. We love what we do. Seeing the faces of our customers light up when they find that perfect dress - it's an amazing feeling to know we have a small part in someone's very special occasion. It's an honor. It's humbling."

Anthony's Bridal & Tuxedo serves local customers but has also sent prom dresses to Arizona, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Michigan, and as far away as Bermuda, England, and South Africa. "They want that Anthony's dress." Starting with only 13 dresses in 1988, they now carry over 300+ wedding gowns in stock, and on average during prom season 400+ gowns.

The Team | If you drive by Anthony's Bridal and Tuxedo shop as so many locals and visitors of Baldwin County have over the years, it's always eye-catching to see the elegant gowns lining the storefront windows. The styles and colors change with the seasons - from Christmas to New Year's, Mardi Gras to high school proms and homecomings, to all of the pageants, quinceañeras, and of course, weddings - it takes a team. Patricia 'Trish' Lassitter is store manager and lead bridal consultant and has been with Anthony's for five years. Debbie Gordon is the seamstress and part-time sales associate. Karlyn Umphrey, a senior at Snook Christian Academy, also works part-time in sales.

Giving Back | "Coming from a small town, we know how important it is to give back. No matter how big Foley gets, we can't lose that small town mentality. That's what makes us who we are. We partner and sponsor with local charities and schools." Anthony and Hope attribute their success in business to their faith in God. "The biggest thing is, this is God's business and we work for Him. The power of prayer has gotten us through it all."



ENGAGED EMPLOYEES CREATE BETTER CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Harvard Business Review | April 2023 | by Denise Lee Yohn



SOUTH BALDWIN
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

An organization's employee experience (EX) has been connected in recent years to how it delivers its customer experience (CX). Given changing dynamics in the labor force and all the ways technology makes it possible for companies, employees, and customers to be connected, I believe it's time for leaders to double down on the idea that EX is now the key driver of CX and to find smarter, strategic ways of connecting the two.

Consider the workforce challenges that currently vex most companies: the dearth of workers skilled for the new demands of business, high turnover rates and the associated costs of recruitment and training, and difficulties in engaging employees given hybrid and other new ways of working, people's elevated expectations for authentic DEI, and broadscale shifts in workers' values. Amid all this, companies struggle to ensure they have a knowledgeable, experienced, and motivated workforce – one that is equipped to deliver a good customer experience.

EX is defined as the sum of everything an employee undergoes throughout his or her connection to an organization, from the first contact as a potential hire to last touchpoints after the end of employment. It requires a holistic, focused, and purposeful approach, but most companies design and manage EX as a set of discrete

It's time for leaders to double down on the idea that the employee experience (EX) is now the key driver of the customer experience (CX) and find smarter, strategic ways of connecting the two.



elements of employment, e.g., flexible work arrangements, rewards and recognition programs, or wellness initiatives. That mode of thinking is outdated. Today's EX is created through the overall company culture, and all the in-between moments, including the ways managers engage employees on a daily basis.

With all its moving parts, the customer experience requires the consistent, cohesive engagement throughout the organization that EX excellence can foster. To tap the power of EX to create compelling CX, business leaders must align the two, directly connect employees and customers, and use tools and processes to identify and report on the impact each has on the other.

IN SUMMARY:

Identify the parallels between the employee and customer experience.

- Where to the biggest gaps exist
- Find creative ways to directly connect employees and customers regardless of whether "customer service" is in their job description

Have a single view of performance across both dimensions.

- With simplified, integrated reporting, managers can better diagnose and track issues
- when employee performance is reported relative to customer metrics, employees tend to become more engaged with the organization and adopt a stronger orientation to business results

Read the article in it's entirety here:
<https://bit.ly/23hbrDLY>





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THE SOUTH BALDWIN CHAMBER'S BUSINESS OF THE MONTH

March

BENSON'S APPLIANCE CENTER, family-owned and operated, has been serving the Baldwin County community since 1973. As one of the largest appliance stores in the area, Benson's Appliance Center carries a wide range of the latest appliances, along with a top tier selection of mattresses. With a reputation based on quality service, excellent prices, and a family atmosphere, Benson's specializes in service, sales, and repair of major brands of appliances. Their highly trained service professionals get the job done and stand behind their work and products.

"As a family-owned business we made a commitment 50 years ago to have the most knowledgeable professionals assist you with your purchase. Our team is friendly and willing to take the time to discuss the details of what you need for your home. Whether you want to stop by to learn more – or plan to purchase a major appliance or mattress – we'll treat you like family. From our sales team and sleep engineers to the delivery and service teams, we have your back every step of the way."



 [bensonappliance.com](https://www.bensonappliance.com) | ☎ (251) 943-5096

April

LIVE OAK VILLAGE, located in Foley, Alabama, is situated on approximately 200 acres covered with beautiful large oaks and only

1.5 miles from South Baldwin Regional Medical Center and other healthcare providers. Voted Best Retirement Community as part of Gulf Coast Media's Best of Baldwin 2022 & 2023, it is a premier senior living community designed to foster independence and wellness. The community affords a vibrant lifestyle filled with beauty, comfort, and convenience allowing residents to design every day of their retirement.

With several floor plans to choose from, Live Oak Village also accommodates a variety of lifestyles and activity levels by offering Homeownership, Independent Living Villas and Apartments, Assisted Living, and Respite Care. Live Oak Village is owned and operated by Community Senior Life, a locally owned non-profit company committed to the continuum of care for seniors. Their care is tailored to each resident's needs and desires – "We want to help you or your loved one experience the retirement they crave and deserve." Stop by for a tour and see the difference today!



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G A T E W A Y I N I T I A T I V E . C O M



Gateway & CACC Host Tri-City Tour with USA's New HTM Dept Chair

The Gateway Team organized and hosted a full day tour alongside Coastal Alabama Community College, to welcome the University of South Alabama's new Department Chair, Dr. Kahl Nusair, to our area. He has made his reputation as one of the most cited marketing scholars in the world. **Full Story** ➡ bit.ly/G23Nusair



Gateway Presents at Seasonal Connect's Spring Summit

On March 21, 2023, the Gateway Team joined Penny Groux, Director of Corporate Affairs for the Perdido Beach Resort, and Mindy Hanan, CEO of the Alabama Restaurant and Hospitality Association to share our region's strategies for dealing with workforce issues in South Baldwin County. **Full Story** ➡ bit.ly/G23SCSS



Gateway & YellowHammer IT have created a **job board** specifically targeting our south Baldwin County area. Since we launched the platform in 2022, we now have over **150 job seekers listed**. Yet, only 20+ active **employers** posting jobs. We need you to register your business, create a profile, and start posting those jobs we know you need to fill! Visit <https://www.gatewaycareerconnection.org/> to get started. For questions, reach out to Tyler@GatewayInitiative.com.

Thank you to our **TOP INVESTORS** for your partnership, leadership, active participation and support in the Gateway Initiative.

Q1 NEWSLETTER

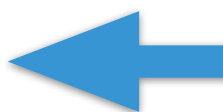


N O W O N L I N E



Check out the Gateway Initiative Q1 Newsletter with articles on Seasonal Workforce Solutions, Gateway Teaming up with Enterprise Commute for Transportation Solution, our staff appointed by the Governor to Workforce Credentialing Committee, + more . . .

<https://bit.ly/2023Q1GW>



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ALABAMA RURAL-OWNED SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Christina Woerner McInnis of SoilKit

See GCM news article:
bit.ly/al2023gcmAPR

In 2019, McInnis founded AgriTech Corp. and created SoilKit to make scientific soil testing easy for homeowners and landscapers. With the use of a smartphone, users can conduct a scientific soil test and SoilKit will geolocate your property, calculate the size of your lawn and maintain an online history of results.

Initially, when SoilKit first went to market, it was only direct-to-consumers at soilkit.com and online on Amazon. Under McInnis's leadership, AgriTech Corp. landed contracts with eight lawn and garden distributors, one major land grant university, one big-box retailer and dozens of landscape companies in its first year of operation.

Christina Woerner McInnis is a fifth-generation farmer from the Woerner Family who has been farming in the area for over 100 years.



HUGH S. BRANYON BACKCOUNTRY TRAIL

Voted 'Best Recreational Trail' in U.S.

See News5WKRG article:
bit.ly/hB23obaN5

Hugs and high fives as the results revealed in Orange Beach. The almost 30 miles of the Hugh Branyon Backcountry Trail is number one in the nation. Doing the maintenance, supervisor Brad Johnson (and crew) was brought to tears with the announcement.

West and Hugh Branyon hatched a plan to build the trail almost 20 years ago. West says it is only fitting that it was named after Branyon who spent decades as superintendent of the state park. "I think Hugh would appreciate that. He thought it was a beautiful plan."

"All the habitats you can visit, the wildlife, there are places on the trail destinations for families that make it special but its accessibility is unparalleled for this length and this type of trail system for disabled users to have access to this park and all these miles of trails." – Phillip West, Director of OBM



FOLEY POLICE DEPARTMENT K9 UNIT

Cpl. Ricks, Ofc. Morris, Sgt. Lizarraga, K9 Tua

See Facebook post:
bit.ly/k9foleyAPR23

The Foley Police Department's K9 Unit recently attended the USPCA Southeast Regionals and brought home several accolades! Sgt. Carlos Lizarraga and K9 Tua placed first in five categories, which tied them with a long standing record by placing first in every category. Sgt. Lizarraga and K9 Tua also placed first overall for the entire competition. Cpl. Curtis Ricks/K9 Niko and Sgt. Carlos Lizarraga/K9 Tua teamed up as a two man team and placed 1st overall. Officer Erik Morris/K9 Bo placed 19th overall. Cpl. Curtis Ricks/K9 Niko took 20th overall.

"Each one of you, including the K9's is to be commended for the endless dedication that you show and the many, many hours of training that you each contribute to the unit, it is undeniably what makes our K9 Unit such a success. We are proud of you!"



DISCOVER AND EXPLORE GREECE, SANTORINI AND MYKONOS
with the SOUTH BALDWIN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

October 20 - 29, 2023

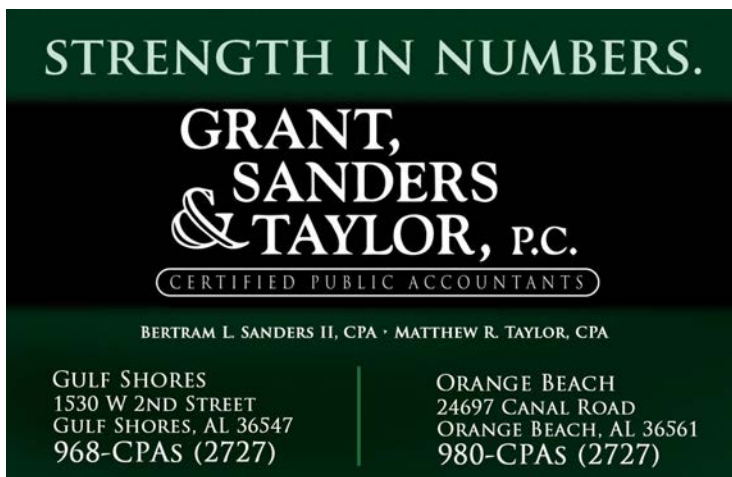
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Extra NEWS YOU CAN USE FROM THE WEB

Five Keys to Accomplishing Positive Change in Your Life, Business & World | MAR '23

Mark Zwilling • Founder & CEO, Startup Professionals

"Change is the only constant in business today, and it requires leadership rather than force.

Change is hard, in business as in your personal life. In my small-business consultancy, I see this daily in owners and professionals struggling with the challenges of new markets and new competitors. Leading change is even harder, trying to balance the demands of the customers against the needs and expectations of employees. But you have to change to survive and thrive.

If you are in a position of some responsibility and power in business, it's hard to stay positive and know how and when you are doing the right thing. [...]

Ginny Rometty, recently retired as chairman and CEO of IBM, interweaves her personal story with a set of principles for leading positive change in our personal lives, workplace, and the world. Here is my summary of her insights, with my thoughts added:

- Strive to make things better by serving others
- Use influence, not authority, to inspire people
- Think critically and creatively about tough choices
- Drive trust and inclusion by advocating for others
- Be resilient as change takes time and relationships

The most effective leaders in business today use these key principles positively to accomplish the change and growth they need through collaboration and engagement with constituents. [...]

Read complete article online: www.inc.com/martin-zwilling/5-keys-to-accomplishing-positive-change-in-your-life-business-world.html ■

How to Revamp Your Company's Meeting Culture |

MAR '23 Dan Scharwbel | LinkedIn Company Culture

For most people, a canceled work meeting might be cause for celebration. In fact, the pointlessness of meetings has become a cultural

phenomenon, one that's been highlighted in social media, television shows, and cartoons for years.

But despite our collective disdain for unnecessary meetings, the recent shift to remote working has led to — you guessed it — even more meetings. [...] Beyond just dealing with frustrated and overworked employees, companies are paying a hefty price tag for all of these useless meetings.

Here are some ideas on how to revamp your company's meeting culture and ensure that the meetings people do have are productive.

- Get a clear picture of your company's current meeting practices
- Create policies to support a better meeting culture and get managers on board
- Empower your employees to skip or even cancel meetings
- Make sure that the meetings people do have are valuable

Final thoughts: A better meeting culture is good for your workforce and your bottom line

Read complete article online: [linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-acquisition/how-to-improve-company-meeting-culture](https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-acquisition/how-to-improve-company-meeting-culture) ■

BBB Business Tip: Ways Small Business Owners Can Cope With Inflation | APR '23 Better Business Bureau

Many small business owners feel the squeeze, with the inflation rate hovering around 6%.

When costs rise, profit margins shrink, and owners must act to keep their businesses profitable.

Here are ways your small business can cope with inflation:

- Reduce expenses, Stock up on necessary supplies
- Have multiple suppliers
- Evaluate your products and services
- Raise prices wisely, Prioritize customer service
- Use technology

Read complete article online: [bbb.org/article/business/26894-bbb-business-tip-7-ways-small-business-owners-can-cope-with-inflation](https://www.bbb.org/article/business/26894-bbb-business-tip-7-ways-small-business-owners-can-cope-with-inflation) ■



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