

Fifteen years ago my eyes were opened to the tremendous value of the Chamber when the manufacturing plant I work for here in Rome transitioned from being an asset of a large international corporation with endless resources available at our beckoning call to being a small privately owned company with little to no resources to draw upon. Having had vast resources in labor law, environmental support, and so forth, I was very concerned as to where our support would come from. At the meeting, I found the answer. I found not only a source for information but I discovered a wonderful hub for networking, an avenue for support of future growth, a place to share ideas, a forum for problem solving, and even a coop to share spare parts for major equipment. GREIA is but one of many groups within the Chamber.

I fully realize that this year we are in a cycle of a different kind of worldwide economics. Some might and have called it a crisis. If indeed it is, it is my strong opinion that a crisis is a terrible opportunity to waste. It is during times like these that our decisions as managers of businesses and leaders of this community mean the most. It is during times like these that we are called upon to make the hard decisions. Inaction and indifference are not options we can afford nor tolerate. We must make the difficult decisions that many would avoid or put off for another time.

We found at Profile Extrusion Company that a decision to make an investment of 8 million dollars into new state of the art equipment at a time when it didn't necessarily make sense to others is making the difference for us being in business today. Though the way ahead is still fraught with many challenges, it is allowing us to continue serving our customers along with the new customers that we have added because of that investment. Profile Extrusion Company is benefitting from that decision today, along with our employees.

Our community can think along those same lines. Many investments have already been made and we are going to work to recruit more to continue to diversify our economy. We certainly need additional jobs. There are public policy implications related to that. Our charter school, The College and Career Academy is the beginning of a new era for us in Rome and Floyd County for our education.

What else could and should we be doing for K-12 and in Higher Education to help make a meaningful difference for the next generation of Romans and Floyd County residents?

What else could and should we be doing related to transportation?

What else could and should we do related to our planning?

And what else could and should we be doing to make certain that we continue to build capacity in Rome and Floyd County for our small businesses, our technology based businesses and all of us who do business here?

With regard to education, and in keeping with our intention to continue the implementation of Rome-Floyd 20/20 part two, it is our sincere hope and desire that Georgia Highlands College can become a 4-year limited mission college and continue its open access for students. We look forward to Coosa Valley Technical College's potential for adding Associate Degrees to its portfolio of academic offerings.

It is our hope and intent that we will build capacity in our community for small business by creating an Angel Investor Network, the idea which was launched during our Technology Symposium and we are continuing to follow through. We are very excited about the potential of what this could bring to Rome and Floyd County for technology based small businesses.

Fellow members, we are also very excited that as we continue to market our community, that more property and infrastructure will be added to our inventory so there is a place for new business to be located as we continue to work to grow our economy. Our work to improve Richard B. Russell Regional Airport and Towers Field is an example of this. We need more jobs, we want higher paying jobs, and our airport can be used for Aviation Companies along with corporate, regional and divisional headquarters. We must protect our airport so we can promote more jobs.

Remember, we're trying to make certain that our next generation, our children, and our children's children have a choice about their future in Rome and Floyd County by way of a choice of a job. All of these are public policy questions that are either an expense or an investment. Our Board of Directors, along with the City of Rome elected officials, our Floyd County elected officials, our development authorities are working hard to best benefit our community in these important issues.

You who are participating in Rome-Floyd 20/20 part II and those who are investing in our Partners in Prosperity program believe in the future of our community and believe that these are investments, not simply expenses. Let's make certain that we take advantage of every opportunity this year and make the right leadership decisions for our community.

Other programs that we're implementing include another opportunity with marketing Rome. We believe that Rome provides many attractive amenities for us to attract retirees to Rome, we have [www.romeretirement.com](http://www.romeretirement.com). This site caters specifically to the aspects of Rome that should interest this targeted group. Healthcare, Higher Education, Real Estate, Arts, Dining, Recreation and so much more. If we can attract more retirees, we will see a local economic boost. Not to mention, our real estate and prestigious healthcare facilities will see a positive impact. We know you will check out the site and pass it along to those you know to help us in this effort.

We are convinced and it was validated by the Symposium that there are people in our community that are willing to invest in new ideas and new innovation. During the Symposium, we talked about Healthcare, Information and Applied Technology. These kinds of ideas are what we're wanting to harvest. We have so many smart people in Rome and Floyd County at our colleges, our healthcare entities and with businesses. These people of all ages have the opportunity to create new jobs by creating new businesses. Angel Investors will be another vehicle that will help to make certain that we optimize our potential.

Also for our small businesses, we will be adding a comprehensive series of workshops including valuable information for beginning small business owners. The new Small Business Resource Council will add great value to members as well. As we enter into this New Year, we look forward to working with our Chamber Executive Committee, Board of Directors, Committee Chairs, Committee members and most importantly, all of you, our dues paying members, along with our Chamber staff.

**2009 Executive Committee:**

Eddie Wilson, River City Bank

Greg Sumner, Professional Screening & Information, Inc.

Ron Tomlinson, Coosa Valley Credit Union

Martin Rhiner, Brugg Wire Rope

Lamante Attaud, TENDO Technologies

Randy Quick, Past-Chairman of the Chamber, South 107/Q 102/WRGA/WGJK

Al Hodge, Greater Rome Chamber of Commerce

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Rome and Floyd County is so fortunate to have so many talented citizens who are interested in the well-being and constant improvement of our community. People who not only come up with ideas and solutions to today's problems and challenges, but who also care enough to put rubber to the road and to take action to make things happen. I am excited about the level of cooperation that I have seen in this community over the past few years. Great things have been accomplished because of that cooperation and a common focus on what is best for the people of Rome and Floyd County.

Great things will continue to happen in this community because of the determination of its people. We will not allow the current crisis to paralyze us to inaction, but rather we will let it energize us to continue to work even harder in creating jobs, investment and prosperity for our community!!