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Conference aiming to help small businesses

BY PHILLIP RAMATI

With the national economy in a slump, there may not be a better time to have a conference geared to helping small businesses.

Macon Mayor Robert Reichert and NewTown Macon will host the Partner America Small Business Conference on Wednesday at Cox Capitol Theatre. The conference, free to the public, is designed to help small businesses by giving access to information and networking to help them grow.

Partner America, the public-private firm created by the U.S. Conference of Mayors to help small and mid-size businesses, has hosted similar seminars all across the country.

"I bumped into representatives (of Partner America) at the U.S. Conference of Mayors," Reichert said. "They said they'd like to come to Macon. It sounded like a good deal for the city. They're doing all the work. The city's just hosting it."

Gordon Bennett, vice president for business and real estate development for NewTown Macon, said people associated with small and mid-size businesses should get a lot out of the conference.

"It's an aid to the business community," he said. "(Attendees can learn) how to maximize profits, market penetration, all that good stuff. All avenues are welcome. It's a great networking opportunity and a way to learn how to access resources. ... It really runs the gamut. From a civic standpoint, we're glad to have the opportunity to host."

George A. Cloutier, co-chairman of Partner America and chairman/CEO of American Management Services Inc., will be the keynote speaker Wednesday, talking about ways businesses can maximize their profits, even during times of economic downturn.

"It focuses on local, state, federal resources for small businesses," Cloutier said.

Cloutier said he has participated in about 100 of these conferences, and they have proven successful across the country. He said the conference is especially useful during the current times of economic hardship across America.

"It's about managing through this difficult, negative environment for your small business - how to make it through these tough times," he said. "Assume you're going to have 15 percent less sales this year. How do you make a profit? What can you do to strengthen sales if you are under fire from things in the economy?"

Reichert said small and mid-size businesses are key to the economic survival of the city.

"They're huge," he said. "All of the information I've seen shows that something like 80 percent of the new jobs in the area come from small businesses. It's nice to have that (big company come in) now and then, but day in and day out, it's the small businesses (which are most important). I encourage people to attend and take advantage of it."

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