

# Metro Chamber celebrates 150th anniversary

*The Metro Atlanta Chamber held its 150th annual meeting on Dec. 3 at the Atlanta Marriott Marquis. Following are the prepared remarks by Chamber President Sam A. Williams.*

Welcome to our 150th annual meeting!

As you walked through these doors, you became part of a legacy of leaders who have been tackling pivotal issues for 150 years now.

That's our theme today — pivotal moments.

In 1860, the issue that brought the Chamber together was railroads.

Business owners in Atlanta were being forced to pay double and triple the rates of other cities to ship freight, so they formed a mercantile association, saying: "By concerted action, we will be better protected."

We stand on the shoulders of giants.

This afternoon, I want to talk about today's most urgent crisis.

Our pivotal moment today is water.

You might ask yourself what this has to do with your business. Well, the way we handle this crisis will determine your business future, your quality of life, your ability to attract workers for the next 50 years.

We have been given a three-year federal timeline. The situation is urgent. If a federal judge's ruling stands, we won't be able to use Lake Lanier for drinking water. We'll be kicked back to 1970s levels — half of what we use today.

For months, we've been working on a task force led by Gov. Perdue. It is co-chaired by John Brock of Coca-Cola Enterprises, who is the Metro Atlanta Chamber's 2011 chairman-elect, and Tim Lowe for the Georgia Chamber.

This task force is made up of about 80 leaders from around Georgia — business leaders, government leaders, and the environmental community.

Their job is to analyze the crisis and find ways to close the gap between the water we need and the water we have. Our strategy is the three Cs:

## ► Conserve

This region's aggressive conservation has already reduced water use by 20 percent. Still, we can do more. I'm asking each one of you to make a personal commitment to conserve water. Consider how you water your lawn. Turn off your faucet when you brush your teeth. Install low-flow fixtures.

## ► Capture

We receive about 50 inches of rain each year. In one weekend alone this year, we got about a third of that rain, but we didn't have the reservoirs to capture it!

## ► Control

We need new policies and procedures so we don't depend entirely on federally controlled lakes Lanier and Allatoona. In a few weeks, the water task force will deliver business-based recommendations to the governor in time for the January legislative session.

In another 150 years, when this Chamber meets and looks back at how we handled the water crisis, how will we

be judged?

Let's talk now about the pivotal moments that have hurt us.

A key example was not passing Georgia statewide banking laws in the 1970s that North Carolina did. Our state government, in the Southeast business capital, made Charlotte a national bank capital.

Another example: Only two counties approved a MARTA referendum in the '60s.

These decisions had real consequences. And some are continuing to have real consequences.

Can you imagine where we will be tomorrow if we don't have a safe, reliable source of drinking water?

Let's talk about what happens when we do make the right choices. Atlanta is the only American city destroyed by war. Our business leaders have been reinventing Atlanta since then.

Here are some pivotal moments that helped us, and shaped our region.

## ► Cotton States Exposition - 1895

Atlanta's spirit first shone from its Civil War ashes. By 1895, Atlanta was rebuilt and ready to strut its stuff nationally.

## ► Forward Atlanta

Forward Atlanta was created in the mid-1920s by businessman Ivan Allen Sr., and key members of our board.

He used to say: "We have to have the money to go North, and get the Yankees' money to come South."

Preston Arkwright, the head of Georgia Power, created an economic development plan and took Atlanta delegations to New York and Chicago.

## ► William B. Hartsfield

William Hartsfield helped create what is now the world's busiest airport and the bedrock of Atlanta's competitive global advantage.

When Hartsfield was still a young business leader, he served on the Chamber's transportation committee. He saw the rise of aviation and suggested an airport.

## ► Mayor Ivan Allen

Mayor Ivan Allen played a crucial role in putting Atlanta on the right side of history during the Civil Rights Movement. Birmingham had fire hoses and dogs. Atlanta became "the city too busy to hate."

In my first job out of Georgia Tech, I worked for Mayor Allen. He was a mentor and friend.

## ► Ambassador Andrew Young and Billy Payne

Ambassador Andrew Young and Billy Payne thrust Atlanta onto a global stage by believing the impossible dream, that we could host the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. I was working for John Portman when they came to pitch us. I remember asking John if they were crazy or visionaries. He said both.

And men and women of courage — leaders like you throughout history — built a legacy of leadership at pivotal moments, recruiting UPS, Georgia-Pacific, and NCR, and achieving our rank in the top five cities for job growth for 30

years. Today we have a number of former Chamber chairmen with us. Please stand as I call your name.

## ► 1974 Chamber Chairman - Brad Currey

He has been and continues to be a leader on the water issue — the most pressing issue today.

## ► 1989 Chamber Chairman - Ron Allen

He helped grow Atlanta's international presence.

## ► 1992 Chamber Chairman - Frank Skinner

He launched the mayor's student internship program.

## ► 1995 Chamber Chairman - Bill Dahlberg

1995 was a critical prep year for the Olympics.

## ► 1996 Chamber Chairman - Andrew Young

The 1996 Centennial Olympic Games were watched by 70 percent of the world. And Ambassador Young has been a tireless champion for civil and human rights.

## ► 1998 Chamber Chairman - Pete Correll

He was a driving force on tipping point issues like GRTA, changing Georgia's flag and saving Grady.

## ► 2005 Chamber Chairman - Tom Bell

He positioned Atlanta as a new global business gateway, working on the Free Trade Area of the Americas campaign, and helping to save Grady.

## ► 2007 Chamber Chairman - Dick Anderson

Under his watch, we launched the Get Georgia Moving coalition that sparked the debate on transportation.

## ► 2008 Chamber Chairman - Kessel Stelling

Under his watch, the Commission for School Board Excellence launched when the Clayton County crisis erupted.

For every former Chamber chairman who just stood up, there are hundreds of you who worked right beside them.

Recently John Rice of GE told me that when he moved to Atlanta after living in 10 different cities, he was amazed that executives are expected and pushed to get engaged in the community here. It's in our DNA. This business community has a national and international reputation. Just go to New York, Chicago, Shanghai, Sao Paulo or Frankfurt and see.

We've just had elections. And as we welcome new and returning elected officials, many of them with us today, that spirit of reaching across parties, across the region, and across the state is the spirit that has always allowed this Chamber to solve problems and get things done.

You in this room have the influence to continue to attract businesses — and the guts to solve the water problem.

Thank you.



**Sam Williams**  
Metro Atlanta Chamber

## 150 years of the Metro Atlanta Chamber

► **1859-1861** Atlanta businessmen organize Atlanta's first chamber of commerce, known as the Mercantile Association.

► **1866-1867** The Chamber is reorganized as a Board of Trade.

► **1867-1871** The organization of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce is effected.

► **1912-1914** Chamber leaders organize the Atlanta Convention Bureau.

► **1922** The Chamber launches the first Forward Atlanta ad program.

► **1941** Delta Air Lines moves to Atlanta.

► **1952** The Chamber organizes the Bonds For Progress campaign for \$12.7 million for the city and county for additional funds for expressway construction.

► **1961** The Chamber launches a second Forward Atlanta program.

► **1964** Business leaders support a 1964 dinner in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize. Passage of a regional rapid transit amendment sets the stage for creation of MARTA.

► **1965** Completion of Atlanta's new stadium opened the way to professional sports.

► **1972** Eastern Airlines starts direct service to Mexico City. The Chamber promotes Atlanta as a "new international city."

► **1978** The Chamber elects Jesse Hill Jr. as the first African-American Chamber president. Air service to London and Brussels is inaugurated. Georgia-Pacific moves to Atlanta.

► **1985** The Chamber sends a delegation to Paris to celebrate inaugural nonstop air service to France. The Chamber begins efforts for recruiting the 1988 Democratic and Republican conventions.

► **1987** The American Cancer Society moves to metro Atlanta.

► **1991** United Parcel Service and the Holiday Inn move to metro Atlanta.

► **1996** Atlanta hosts the Centennial Olympic Games.

► **2000** Cingular Wireless moves to metro Atlanta.

► **2001** Merial and GE Power Systems move to metro Atlanta.

► **2002** The Chamber helps Mayor Shirley Franklin pass a sales tax to support an overhaul of the city's water and sewer system.

► **2003** Business leaders work to change Georgia's state flag. Newell Rubbermaid moves to metro Atlanta.

► **2006** Business leaders raise money to bring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s papers back to Atlanta.

► **2007** The Chamber convenes a task force to help save Grady Memorial Hospital. Get Georgia Moving convenes to show its support for transportation funding.

► **2009** NCR and First Data move to metro Atlanta. Gov. Sonny Perdue launches water task force chaired by business leaders.