



TIMES-PICAYUNE COLUMN – December 25, 2011

Contact: Michelle Biggs

Phone: 985.273.3006

E-mail: michelle@sttammanychamber.org

Chamber overcame big challenges in 2011

Everyone that is not a scrooge loves this time of year. Though hectic, it is a time to be merry and have fun. The real reason for the season may not be given enough recognition every day, but He is the source of all blessings.

As a working wife and now grandmother, I am now over the hectic part and into the merriment as I write this final article of 2011. Miraculously, the stockings are stuffed, the gifts are wrapped. It wasn't easy, but also miraculously, my five siblings, our children and our children's children were all together at our home last Saturday. At the end of the day I had an ah-ha moment: a dream had just come true! Even our distant cousin Papa Noel was there! Everyone pitched in to help make it happen and I was so grateful to now have the special memory.

This brings me back to Chamber news. It wasn't an easy year. Like all businesses we were impacted by the economy. Several of our staff members moved on to other jobs. The turnover took a toll, though temporarily. It was hectic. Our Executive Committee, led by **Lisa Blossman**, as well as our committee chairmen, were supportive throughout the re-hiring and training process. Member services were maintained, events promoted and well attended. **Michelle Biggs** our C.A.O., maintained a sense of calm for all of us as she helped interview, train and take on extra duties.

I used the term "under renovation" as we re-built our team. As of November, we were not only fully staffed, but staffed with experienced super-stars, enthusiastically ready and willing to provide our members outstanding service and carry out the programs and policies set by our board of directors for 2012 and beyond. As I like to say in lighter moments, we had some miracles from above. Professionally, we say "The renovation is complete."

Our one-on-one contact with small business members as well as our Executive Level members provided feedback on their expectations of member benefits as well as in many cases giving us good news about recovery and growth in their businesses.

Our incoming Board of Directors, led by **Kieran Weldon**, Advisory Board and Committee Chairs are each eager and enthusiastic about their servant leadership roles in the year ahead. They know a strong Chamber is needed to enhance and maintain a strong atmosphere for commerce to occur. On behalf of our board of directors and staff, we wish each of today's readers a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

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Cutline: The Chamber staff wishes everyone a very Merry Christmas! From the left: Lacey Toledano, President and CEO; Barry Cottrell, Director of Membership and Sales; Holly LaBarre, Office Administrator; Michelle Biggs, CAO; Melissa Bordelon, Membership and Events Coordinator; Amy Ybarzabal, Communications Coordinator.

Lacey Toledano is the St. Tammany West Chamber of Commerce's President and CEO. She can be contacted at info@sttammany chamber.org.