

Chamber will cut dozens of ribbons to encourage local shopping

When a new business holds a ribbon cutting, it's a time for the owners, employees, the public and business community to celebrate the hope and prosperity that increased commerce represents.

That is the idea behind Sprinting for Business, an eight-hour marathon where members of the St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce will host ribbon cuttings at businesses across the parish that are open, or have reopened, and are following the COVID-19 restrictions.

There are 1,100 chamber members, and as many as 80 of them will participate in the sprint from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on July 14.

"Our members employ 30,000 people," said Jessica Hester, the chamber's director of operations. "People who invest in our community are the lifeblood of the community. When you buy locally, your tax dollars go to benefit the community."



Hester

St. Tammany Chamber announced it had become a parish-wide organization in November and recently opened offices in Slidell. It will have teams from both the Slidell and Covington offices spread out to cut ribbons.

"This is a unique way to show the public that St. Tammany businesses are open and ready to shop with," she said.

But these will not be typical grand-opening ribbon cuttings with large gatherings of people.

Each ribbon cutting will only involve chamber members and the business owner or owners, last no more than 10 minutes and accommodate COVID-19 restrictions, Hester said. The chamber team will then sprint off to the next location.

Sprinting for Business will also kick off a Receipt Raffle in which the public can submit photos of receipts from any chamber business it patronizes in order to participate in a raffle drawing each Friday for four weeks following the event.

A receipt for every \$25 spent at any chamber

business can be entered into the drawings for prizes, which will include gift certificates and services.

Hester said the ribbon cuttings indicate that St. Tammany has a lot to celebrate.

"We have not had a high number of closings," of local businesses since the COVID-19 restrictions, she said, although some national retailers that were struggling before the cutbacks have closed.

And she hopes the ribbon cutting will help create public awareness of the value of shopping local.

"A lot of it comes down to customer service. The smaller retailer is able to answer your questions. It's the interaction with people that will always be important."

There is also the issue of supporting parish infrastructure to consider.

"Again and again, the three things that come up as important to the public are drainage, bridges and roads," Hester said, noting that 2% of the taxes collected locally goes to drainage, bridges and road.

In the months since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the chamber has hosted virtual happy hours and a trivia night, as well as webinars for business owners to talk to bankers, CPAs, attorneys and experts that could share resources from across the state.

It also made educational materials and signs explaining the limitations on occupancy and health requirements available to businesses for download and display.

She said that while annual chamber events like Southern Nights are on hold, the popular FanUp is being redesigned as a luncheon.

Sprinting for Business is a sign of prosperity and of hope — both of which are needed now.

A directory of eligible St. Tammany Chamber businesses is available at business.sttammanychamber.org/list.

For information, visit the chamber offices at 610 Hollycrest Blvd. in Covington, 2220 Carey St. in Slidell or call (985) 273-3003.



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