

# Up to the Challenge

NOACC ENCOURAGES ITS MEMBERS TO OFFER MORE TO NORTHEAST OHIO BUSINESSES TO HELP THEM GROW AND THRIVE.



Vicky Hawke and Mary Stamler

In a time when the buzz around Northeast Ohio is often focused on the negative, the Northern Ohio Chambers of Commerce (NOACC) stays focused on the positive. “We hear about the bad stuff, and sometimes we overlook the good stuff,” says Vicky Hawke, NOACC executive director. “We may have lost several industries in past years, but we still have a lot to offer in Ohio.”

Founded in 1995 by eight area chambers of commerce, NOACC was created to leverage its buying power and provide affordable insurance and benefits to chamber members. Today, NOACC boasts a membership list of more than 130 chambers, serving 35,000 business-people.

As an advocate for growth in Northeast Ohio, NOACC conducted the Business Pulse Survey 2006 to identify exactly what Northern Ohio business owners value about the region and what keeps them here.

The survey produced some remarkable results. “We found there are a lot of things they love about Ohio, but there was a lot that they didn’t know,” says Hawke. “Many business people did not

know how high Ohio ranked in education.”

Access to leading health care institutions and affordable health care ranked at the top of the list of factors that contribute to the quality of life in the region. Affordability and higher education are leading strengths

of our region, but many perceived that job opportunities ranked at the bottom.

Using the survey results, and recognizing Northeast Ohio’s businesses are the ambassadors for promoting new business in the region, NOACC set out to promote the chambers of commerce that excel in program offerings and support. “The chamber promotes [business within their community and the region], it’s really a great network,” says Hawke. “Businesses in general need to look at their chamber as their concierge.”

So NOACC issued a “Chamber Challenge” to encourage members to expand their offerings. “The challenge was to do even more to retain growth and grow membership,” explains Mary Stamler, NOACC chairperson and executive director of the Garfield Heights Chamber of Commerce. “One of the biggest things is the value of networking with the chamber. We have chambers that are doing so many events.”

Judging was held in April by a panel that included representatives

from WECO Fund Inc., the lending arm of the Small Business Administration (SBA); the small-business development division of the Urban League of Greater Cleveland; and (Counselors to America’s Small Business) SCORE Cleveland.

In May, NOACC recognized 14 chambers with the NOACC Growth Chamber Challenge Award 2007 for their programming and membership efforts. “I’m just amazed to see how many events chambers are participating in,” says Hawke. “All of it is so beneficial to the communities they are serving.”

The chambers initiated a wide variety of programs. For example, the Middlefield Chamber of Commerce started a safety council, open to members and nonmembers, that offers workers’ compensation discounts to eligible participants. The Warrensville Heights Tri-City Chamber created a new Business Expo, which webcasted business and chamber speakers globally, and added podcasts to its online “virtual” Business Expo throughout the year.

“Each one had a different application,” says Hawke of the honored chambers. “They launched initiatives that were unique to their respective communities.” +

**Northern Ohio Area  
Chambers of Commerce**  
6000 Freedom Square Dr., Suite 540  
Independence, OH 44131  
1-866-GO-NOACC  
[www.noacc.org](http://www.noacc.org)