

# Synovus CEO takes reins as Chamber chairman

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Taking the podium Monday as the newest chairman of the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce, Richard Anthony wasted no time summing up 2009.

“I think I’m pretty well versed right now in understanding what challenging conditions look like, and many of you are as well,” the chairman, chief executive officer and president of Synovus Financial Corp. told a packed Legacy Hall at the RiverCenter for the Performing Arts.

Anthony’s Columbus-based bankholding firm has endured several unprofitable quarters, forcing it to cut expenses and its work force over the past 18 months.

“Despite the challenging conditions overall, we are very fortunate in this community and in this region to have a lot of momentum working in our favor,” the executive said, ticking off the area’s attributes.

There’s the continued “explosive” growth at Fort Benning, he said. There’s also the growth at Columbus State University, the burgeoning employment impact of automaker Kia Motors in the region and more jobs on the way at automated teller machine manufacturer NCR Corp.

“These are all shining examples of this uniqueness, this momentum, this strength that we have as we go through 2010,” said Anthony, who worked last year to get two sales-tax referendums passed, benefiting the city’s public safety and education sectors.

## **The awards go to ...**

The 164th annual meeting of the chamber also was a stage for honoring community leaders.

John F. Flournoy was presented with the Jim Woodruff Jr. Memorial Award, while Billy Blanchard received the J.R. Allen Memorial Award, revived after a hiatus of several years.

Flournoy, chairman and chief executive officer of Flournoy Development Co., is a decorated former U.S. Marine who built a thriving apartment complex construction firm over four decades. That’s the business side. But in the community, Flournoy has been a major supporter of the Boys & Girls Clubs. He also has led the Columbus Gateways program since 1992, working to landscape and beautify the city’s major roadways.

Blanchard is president of Columbus Bank & Trust Co. and the son of retired Synovus chairman and CEO Jim Blanchard, who received the same award in the early 1970s when he was president of CB&T. The younger Blanchard’s civic and community involvement includes serving on several economic development boards and committees in the city. He also has invested plenty of time in United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley, including chairing the 2009 fund-raising campaign.

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## More jobs? More money

In his final chair report before turning the ceremonial chamber gavel over to Anthony, Russ Carreker, president and CEO of Bytewise Measurement Systems, pointed out the past year's accomplishments.

Most notable was the announcement of five new companies to the area, with six expansions of existing businesses. The net gain was 1,900-plus jobs with more than \$136 million in capital investment in the Valley Partnership region.

On the flip side, Carreker said there's more opportunities on the way. But the chamber needs more resources to tackle economic development, along with community and political issues.

"It's just solid financial footing," Carreker said of the biggest challenge facing the chamber, which has a \$4.9 million annual budget and 1,100 corporate members — totaling about 1,500 individual members.

"We're in good shape," Carreker said. "We're a nonprofit that has zero debt. We're in a great building. We've got a lot of things going on. But the chamber does so many things for this community ... To do all of that right takes significant financial resources."

The chamber's yearly budget needs to be in the neighborhood of \$5.7 million, said Mike Gaymon, chamber president and CEO. He said the chamber would like to see its membership rolls climb to around 3,000, taking into account its regional focus.

Marketing the area and growing the chamber's membership must be one of its top priorities this year, Gaymon stressed.

"We've got the greatest growth perhaps this region's ever seen coming up, and yet we don't have the resources to do a lot of the things that you need to do to make sure that you're ready for growth," he said. "So it's a catch-22. Businesses are hurting; we understand that. But we've got to look out to what we're going to do this year and next year to make sure that we're prepared for the growth that's coming."

### WHO WERE THEY?

**JIM WOODRUFF JR. MEMORIAL AWARD:** Named after the one-time owner of WRBL radio, which became WRBL-TV in 1953. He died in 1976 while in Athens, Ga., to attend a Georgia Bulldogs football game, a passenger in a car struck by a drunken driver.

**J.R. ALLEN MEMORIAL AWARD:** Formerly given out by the Columbus Jaycees, but not presented for several years, it is named after the visionary Columbus mayor who worked to consolidate the city and Muscogee County governments in the early 1970s, making them more efficient. Allen, a self-made millionaire and Kentucky Fried Chicken franchisee, was killed in the winter of 1973 in a light plane crash on a trip to give a speech in Rome, Georgia.