

Chamber building gets name Houchens donates \$400,000 for site

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Tuesday, September 26, 2006 11:54 AM CDT

Bowling Green-based Houchens Industries will have naming rights to the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce's new building, after the company said today it would donate \$400,000 toward the building's construction.

The 15,000-square-foot building at the corner of Seventh Avenue and College Street will be called the Houchens Industries Center for Business and will be completed in the first quarter of next year, according to Michael Murphy, chairman of the capital campaign.

"You can just see it ... you can feel it ... you can imagine how it's going to look and how it's going to be utilized," Murphy said. "It's going to be a state-of-the-art facility, and it's going to initialize all the new development for downtown."

Donations from Houchens and about 200 other chamber partners total more than \$2.8 million for construction of the building.

Houchens Industries Chairman Jimmie Gipson downplayed the gift as a continuation of Houchens' commitment to the community.

"I'm just glad we're able to do it," Gipson said, calling the chamber of commerce "crucial to the community."

He also said the participation from the other 200 companies donating is what determines the success of organizations like the chamber of commerce.

Doug Gorman, the chamber's Building Committee chairman, said the basic footprint of the first floor is already in place. Gorman gave building tours after Houchens' announcement this morning.

"It will give everyone a sense of what the building has and what it will be," he said.



Photo by Joe Imel/Daily News
Charles Strode of Tompkinsville, an employee of The 31 Corp., connects beams Monday at the site of the new Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce building at College Street and Seventh Avenue. Houchens Industries has contributed \$400,000 to the project and has earned naming rights. The building will include the title Houchens Industries Center for



Photo by Joe Imel/Daily News
Jimmie Gipson, board chairman of Houchens Industries, speaks today about the donation.

In October, the exterior framing and electrical work will start, Gorman said.

Gorman said it was “the greatest feeling in the world” to know the chamber exceeded its initial fundraising goal of \$1.5 million.

“It says a lot about the business community and how blessed we feel to be here,” Gorman said. “Every good thing that happens in Bowling Green and Warren County is a team effort and this is just one more example of that.”

Jim Hizer, president and chief executive officer of the chamber, said he's looking forward to the chamber being able to do more for the community.

“This chamber is not going to be saddled with onerous ongoing debt obligations and as a result will be able to dedicate resources toward chamber programming, including economic development,” Hizer said.

Along with the naming rights to the building, Houchens will have a lobby display featuring a waterfall designed by Hitcents.com, according to Hitcents.com President Chris Mills.

Mills' company is writing special software for the waterscreen, since it will also act as an interactive presentation for visitors.

“This is kind of a new technology piece that's not really on the marketplace today,” Mills said.

Mills said the waterscreen will showcase the technology available in Bowling Green which in turn will hopefully appeal to outsiders looking to relocate to the city.

Hitcents is also the company that won the bid to install the chamber's technological infrastructure, featuring high-tech security, surveillance, access card, lighting and climate-control systems based on the company's EyeOn software.

Because of that, the chamber's building will have automated conference rooms that includes projector screens.

“We're excited to be a part of this enhancement to the Bowling Green area,” Mills said.

The chamber's capital campaign continues to gain momentum, and companies can still donate, said Tonya Matthews, vice president of chamber operations.

“It's been such an exciting past few months to see the chamber's building really taking shape,” Matthews said. “It has moved quickly. This project has been on a fast-track timeline since it took off.”

For a commitment of \$1,000 over a five-year period, a business' name is listed in the lobby of the new chamber headquarters for the life of the building, according to Matthews. There are six levels of contributions, with the highest being those donating \$100,000 or more, she said.

“It may be the best marketing dollars a company or organization spends in the next five years, essentially added up to 50 years or more of prominent exposure. And above that, there is the return on the investment as our chamber will be a step ahead of the competition and all will benefit,” Matthews said.

Houchens Industries is the largest employee-owned company in the United States.

Houchens, with approximately \$3 billion in annual sales and 10,000 employees, has interests in the grocery, tobacco, construction, insurance, recycling and manufacturing industries.



Photo by Joe Imel/Daily News
Scott & Murphy's Bruce Williams, of Rock Creek in Grayson County, carries wood Monday across construction site of the new Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce building at College Street and Seventh Avenue. A basement added to the final design of the building for storage has brought the two-story structure to 17,500 square feet, an increase from the 15,000 square feet.