

The ADVOCATE

Expo proves vital in slow economy

By Michael C. Juliano
Staff Writer

Article Launched: 11/07/2008 02:55:19 AM EST

About 75 area businesses came together Thursday to showcase their wares and make new contacts at the fourth annual Dual Chamber Expo & Business After Hours, hosted by the Stamford and Greater Norwalk chambers of commerce.

The three-hour event, held at the University of Connecticut's Stamford campus, featured businesses such as banks, fitness centers and restaurants, along with several nonprofit organizations.

The expo gives businesses a chance to network and create new opportunities, said Brian Griffin, vice president of the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce.

"In slower economic times, you need more awareness and exposure to get the same results you had before," he said.

The event also helps nonprofit groups find new corporate sponsors, said Robin Wexler, manager of marketing and communications for Stepping Stones Museum for Children in Norwalk.

"It's always a challenge because companies are being held accountable to tighten their bottom lines," she said. "Even though times are tough, companies still want to do good things in the communities that they serve."

It also provides UConn with the opportunity to show businesses the educational programs it has for employers and their staffs, said Sheila Moore, director of administration and external affairs for UConn's Stamford campus.

"It also lets employers to network with other businesses that they may not come into contact with on a regular basis," she said.

The expo, which was free and open to the public,

attracts about 400 people every year, said Barbara Seiter, vice president of the Stamford Chamber of Commerce.

"It's very successful because it's geared to the small-to-medium-size business person," she said. "It offers them the chance to contact each other face to face, rather than just through sales calls or direct mail."

Dayle Day, an entrepreneur who recently opened a Butterfly Life women's fitness center in Norwalk, said she hopes the event will give her business the lift it needs.

"We feel 2009 will be one of the busiest fitness years because people will be less afraid of the economy," she said. "It's an inexpensive way for people to feel good about themselves."

The expo is an effective way to expand business during the tough economy, said Marcus Sweeney, a manager of business development for Stamford-based Robustelli Corporate Services.



Businesses and nonprofit organizations attend the fourth annual Dual Chamber Expo & Business After Hours on Thursday at the Stamford campus of the University of Connecticut. The three-hour event was hosted by the Stamford and Greater Norwalk chambers of commerce. (Paul Desmarais/Staff photo)

"When the economy gets better, we'll have a much bigger client base to draw from," he said.

Lindsey de Stronie, a catering and event coordinator for the Tuscan Oven in Norwalk, said despite the economy, business is still hot.

"We're here to let people know that we have a large facility and great facility," she said. "I also want to meet other people."

Catrina Derby, a sales representative for Brewster, N.Y.-based 21st Century Business Systems, a distributor of Panasonic copiers and printers, said the economy has not slowed their business.

"We want people to get to know who we are," she said.

Myrna Yanni, the owner of Myrna's Authentic Mediterranean Bistro in Stamford and Greenwich, said many customers are still coming through the door.

"I think the economy has affected every business, but we've had a steady business," she said as she was handing out samples of Lebanese and Middle Eastern cuisine. "We always hope for more."

- Staff Writer Michael C. Juliano can be reached at michael.juliano@scni.com or 964-2417.