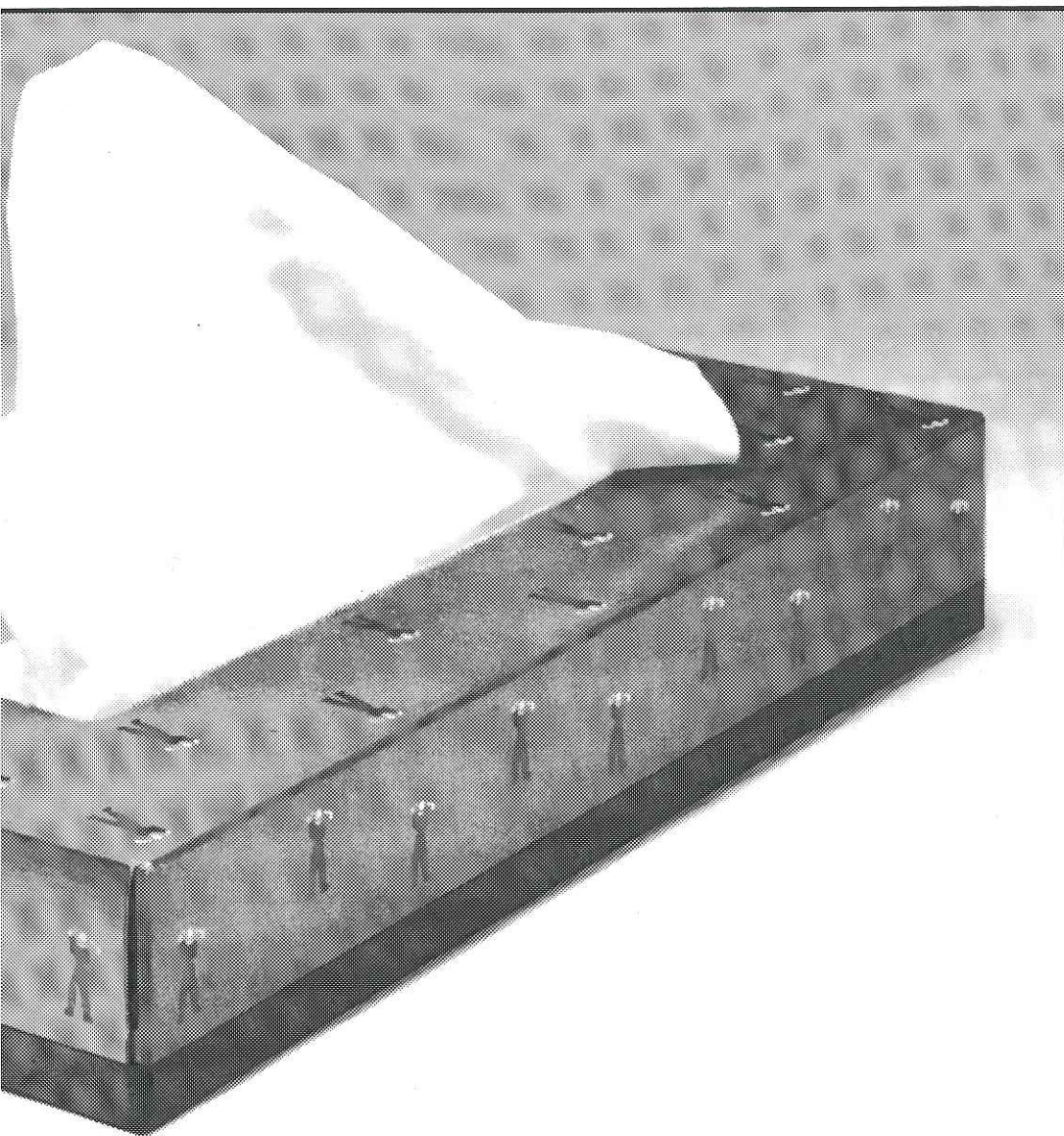




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Chamber Pursues Ambitious Small Business Agenda

1995 was a pivotal year for small-business members of the Delaware State Chamber. A former small-business owner himself, John Burris appointed a group of representatives to come together as a Steering/Ad Hoc Committee on Small-Business Services, assess the climate for this segment of the membership and recommend a strategy to update the Chamber's focus on its 2,800 small-business members.

An independent consultant, Joseph R. Petrilli, through individual interviews and focus groups, helped assess the needs of small-business members of the Chamber and reported the results to the Steering Committee, chaired by William M. Topkis, in January, 1995. The Ad Hoc Committee for Small-Business Services, under the leadership of Michael S. Uffner, then spent the next six months developing a plan for a new and comprehensive program of work for Delaware State Chamber small-business members. Priority was given to providing those services requested most by Chamber members, as identified in the needs assessment process.

The plan was reviewed by the Board of Directors last fall and will be implemented early in 1996. The first phase calls for a reallocation of additional Chamber staff resources to small-business programs; the establishment of a statewide basic skills and training and development program; a Small-Business Summit; a new committee structure; stepped-up communications; and the establishment of a Small Business Alliance.

Established as an arm of the State Chamber of Commerce, the Small Business

Alliance was created to represent the specific interests of businesses with fewer than 150 employees. It will be guided by its own Board of Managers with staffing support from the State Chamber.

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"Small businesses form the backbone of our economy, yet it is very difficult for them to have influence as individuals...As a group of nearly 3,000 employers, however, they can speak with a very strong voice."

— John M. Burris

them to have influence as individuals," says John M. Burris, State Chamber president. "As a group of nearly 3,000 employers, however, they can speak with a very strong voice. The Small Business Alliance will make it possible for this voice to be heard loud and clear."

The Small Business Alliance will be modeled after other small-enterprise programs that have proven successful around the country, such as the Council on Small Enterprises which has functioned very successfully as part of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association.

As the largest organization of small companies in the State of Delaware, the Alliance will focus on the following initiatives:

- Identify group-oriented benefit offerings in areas such as health care insurance, worker's compensation cover-

age, business insurance, utility audits, 401K plans and telecommunications packages;

- Design a comprehensive package of basic skills training and employee development programs;

- Establish networking programs

which benefit Alliance members as both buyers and sellers of goods and services;

- Develop a small-business legislative agenda at the local, state and federal levels to be supported by State Chamber lobbying efforts;

- Take advantage of resources offered by State Chamber affiliates at the national level, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Retail Council; and

- Maximize opportunities to communicate small business priorities through the State Chamber's publications, television program and World Wide Web site.

Members of the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce with 150 or fewer employees will be eligible to participate in the Small Business Alliance. Currently, over 2,800 of the organization's 3,300 total

members are small businesses.

The Alliance will be able to take advantage of the Chamber's five registered lobbyists and have a direct impact on legislation undertaken at the local, state and federal levels that will affect the daily competitiveness of its members. In fact, to ensure that the impact is particularly felt at the federal level from which many of the laws and regulations affecting small-business originate, a new State Chamber committee has been formed—the Congressional Action Committee—to focus strictly on federal issues. To encourage cross-communications, the Delaware Delegation of the 1995 White House Conference on Small Business has been invited to become charter members of this group. Small-manufacturing and other small-business members of the State Chamber are also urged to participate.

Michael S. Uffner of Delaware Cadillac will serve as Acting Chairman of the Small Business Alliance until the Board of Managers is elected and meets to select its leaders. William M. Topkis, of Daniels, Daniels, Topkis and McDermott, will serve as Acting Vice-Chairman. State Chamber professional Robin L. Petrucci has been appointed interim Vice President for Small Business and Executive Director of the Alliance. She will help guide the organizational development process and will coordinate activities, meetings and initiatives of the Small Business Alliance.

Delaware State Chamber small business members interested in participating in the Small Business Alliance should contact Robin Petrucci at (302) 576-6574. ♦

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