

# Black Business Coalition

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Almost 100 Black-owned businesses are listed on the Williamson County Chamber's Black-Owned Businesses list. The list includes businesses that deal in art, graphics, design and printing to real estate, hospitality, retail professional services and more. Black-owned businesses in Williamson County are growing and expanding their purview beyond the Black community to reach the county's growing diverse population.

Those numbers were much lower several years ago when the Williamson County Chamber and Office of Economic Development realized that as business and industry grew in the county, Black businesses were being underserved and underrepresented within the chamber.

That needed to change if the chamber was to adhere to their stated belief "in creating a diverse and inclusive business community." In 2020 the Williamson County Chamber of Commerce formed the Black Business Coalition as a part of its effort to address the unique needs of minority and

Black business owners within the Franklin and Williamson County communities.

Under the leadership of co-chairs Robert Blair, small business owner; Tara Blue, Community Childcare Center executive director; Jemond Daugherty, former Good Food Group owner; and Jeff McGruder, Citizens Bank's chief relationship officer, the coalition's first challenge was to evaluate the chamber's role in helping Black and minority businesses grow in Williamson County.

"Black businesses in the county are tight-kept secrets because a lot of them can't afford storefronts," Blue said in a 2021 interview.

Most sell their products or services online, in the home, at their churches, expos, festivals and in trucks.

Three years later it's still difficult for Black small businesses to get storefronts; however, they are discovering ways to improve and grow their businesses. The Black Business Coalition and the Chamber are working with Black businesses in creative ways to provide resources about running a business, creating a brand and getting a business loan so they can progress, grow and succeed to whatever level they wish to

attain.

Although the onset of the coronavirus slowed the process, once everything reopened the coalition went straight to work moving ideas to actions. It began by hosting mixers to introduce Black entrepreneurs to other business owners creating opportunities for networking and concept sharing.

A four-week academy was offered providing information about marketing and business strategies. The academy was such a success, it earned the Chamber a national award, Blue said.

The coalition continues to provide Black businesses with support, a set of tools to reach full potential and networking opportunities.

Last summer the Juneteenth festival on Franklin's Main Street provided an opening for Black businesses to set up a booth at a festival and get noticed. The coalition has also partnered with the Heritage Foundation's festivals committee to set sliding vendor rates for small Black businesses.

For its meetings, the chamber and the coalition "intentionally" use Black businesses for programs and added them among the caterers used during luncheons and events.

Since the coalition organized there have been many successes, but Blue is impatient. "I wish we could see a better impact," she said.

The Black Business Coalition is current-



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Jeff McGruder is the chief relationship officer for Citizens Bank, founded in 1904 in Nashville to serve the African American community in the area. It is now the nation's oldest continuously Black-owned bank.

ly organizing its 2024 calendar. Black businesses should look for future opportunities and possibly another academy.

The BBC meets regularly and continues to brainstorm ideas to help Black businesses succeed, and the chamber is actively promoting those "tight-kept secrets."

For more information about the Black Business Coalition, contact Williamson Inc. at [www.williamsonchamber.com/contact](http://www.williamsonchamber.com/contact). To add a Black-owned business to the list of Black-owned businesses, contact Jena Potter at [jenna@williamsonchamber.com](mailto:jenna@williamsonchamber.com).

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