

CHAMBER DIRECTOR A PEOPLE PERSON NEW DIRECTOR OF SW BROWARD UNIT SET TO MEET NEEDS

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

For Stella Tokar, her new position as Director of the Southwest Broward Regional Chamber of Commerce is very similar to her old work as Program Director at the Florida Bible Church in Miramar.

“Both jobs involve meeting the needs of people,” she reflected. “Both have programs to support people in need, though the needs at the church are usually spiritual while at the chamber they are economic.”

Tokar is in a transition period from her work at the church where her husband, Rev. Pete Tokar, is the Senior Pastor, to assuming the responsibility of setting the regional chamber on a forward course.

“The chamber lost its director about six months ago and the organization has been through a variety of changes in the past two or three years,” Tokar said. “One thing I’m going to strive for is consistency in the organization. I’m here for the long haul.”

Tokar said that she is interested in training volunteers and leaders in the community. “The chamber is a membership organization and I want to respect the time of the volunteers who work to make it operate.”

“I like to teach leadership and help people,” Tokar said. “I want to help people be more effective leaders and help them to grow. I want to help them understand their value and worth. It’s one thing for people to know that they are valued and another to feel it.”

While recognizing that every leader has a different strength and purpose, Tokar said that the chamber can also help to build teamwork among its members. “The chamber’s impact is many faceted,” Tokar explained. “One of the most important things that we can provide is networking among all of the business people of the community.”

The Southwest chamber counts both small businesses and organizations as large as NBC among its constituents. “We are not small business nor large business minded, but we are here to help the business person.”

Tokar said that the chamber connects with the community in many ways, including helping with local projects, offering government affairs and political involvement forums and the training of leadership.

The chamber also operates a scholarship fund for local youth and has set up a system of member-to-member discounts. “We want to encourage our members to do business with each other,” Tokar explained.

As the chamber's new director, Tokar is looking for additional ways in which the organization can serve the community. "We need to identify needs and then create an event to meet it," she said. She cites her church's response to the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington as a model of responding to community needs. "We immediately sponsored a blood drive and held a memorial service," she said. "Many city officials attended that service."

The chamber's offices are in Pembroke Pines, but also serve the communities of Miramar, Weston, Cooper City and Davie.

Tokar, who lives in Pembroke Pines, brings wide experience to her new position. "We moved here from Washington, D.C., four and a half years ago and I joined the chamber in order to get to know the community and meet people," she said. "I moved through the ranks, served on the board and eventually on the chamber's executive committee."

After serving a stint as the chamber's member services director, Tokar left to work first at the church's Florida Bible Christian School where she was Director of Development before taking the programming position at the church.

Before relocating to south Florida, Tokar was involved in several non-profit organizations, working on school bus safety issues, addressing offensive lyrics on music albums and other community issues.

"I love being able to make a difference in a community," Tokar said.

Chamber officials said that they are sure they have made the right choice in selecting Tokar to lead them." She knows the chamber inside and out, she knows the community and she knows public officials," stated Nancy Lombardi, the chamber's 2000-2001 chairwoman.

"The chamber has been at a standstill since the last director left," Lombardi said. "In spite of that, we have carried out all of our planned events. But now, we think that great things will happen.

Lombardi, a resident of Aventura who owns Pleasure Travel in Pembroke Pines, said that chamber leaders would be developing a five-year plan at an upcoming weekend conference.

Nearly 200 people applied for the director's position. "We are enthusiastic about our decision to hire Stella," Lombardi said. "It's the first time that I can remember that our board has voted unanimously for anything. We took a long time to make the decision because we wanted to be sure that we were choosing the right person."

Lombardi said that the last two directors had been from outside of the community. "In selecting Stella, we have chosen someone who knows the community and will be great in

the field. In addition, with her organizational skills, she will also be great working inside the organization's structure."

"You always wonder when you hire someone if you have made the right choice, but Stella is already shining in that position," confirmed Lenor Ryan, chair of the search committee and General Manager of the Pembroke Lakes Mall. "She projects a positive image for the chamber in southwest Broward."

Ryan, who lives in Hollywood, said that Tokar has just the qualities that the chamber was looking for. "Her experience matches our need," she said. "She has managerial experience, sales experience and the training we want."

Although relatively new to Broward County, Tokar extols its virtues. "I love the diversity of the area," she said. "I enjoy its many colors, languages and types of people."

Having lived around the world as the wife of a military chaplain, Tokar said that living in south Florida is "like everywhere we have ever lived in one spot."

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