

## Tulsa's Disaster-Resistant Business Task Force



Tulsa's new Disaster-Resistant Business Task Force members are working together to help area small businesses and nonprofits develop *Open for Business*<sup>SM</sup> plans to survive disasters. *Left to right:* Ann Patton, Open for Business<sup>SM</sup>, Institute for Business & Home Safety; Rick Myers, Association of Contingency Planners, Oklahoma Chapter; Linda Muirheid, Tulsa City-County Health Department; Sandy Cox, Bank of Oklahoma (co-chair); Dave Hall, State Farm

The Disaster-Resistant Business Task Force wants to “increase the odds that Tulsa-area businesses and non-profit agencies will survive a disaster by encouraging pre-disaster continuity planning, property protection, emergency preparedness, public education, and related actions.”

Several members who were working independently and decided to pool their efforts in early 2006. The program includes training workshops and conferences, public education and outreach, and a news media campaign. The Chamber's Small Business Council serves as the focus group to help guide the planning.

Insurance (co-chair); Claudia Arthrell, Family & Children's Service, Oklahoma; Crystal Kline, Mayor's Citizen Corps; Tim Lovell, Mayor's Citizen Corps; Dennis Currington, Tulsa Metro Chamber; Bob Roberts, RD Flanagan & Associates. Not shown: Diana McClure, IBHS.

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A typical *Open for Business<sup>sm</sup>* plan covers a dozen elements, such as a property protection plan; how to stay in touch with key vendors and other contacts; identification of critical business functions, records, and equipment and how to safeguard them, data recovery; a disaster response checklist; and identification of an alternate location to operate if your primary office is not accessible.

When disasters strike, small businesses are uniquely vulnerable. Twenty-five percent of small businesses closed down by disasters simply never reopen.

The Tulsa Metro Chamber and a home-grown team of mentors are trying to change those odds. Organized under the banner of “Open for Business,” this team of volunteers is helping small businesses plan now to survive fire, flood, wind, power loss, or other troubles that can sink even the most determined entrepreneurs.

Small business preservation is central to the Chamber’s strategy for growing the local economy. As in most communities, small business is Tulsa’s backbone, accounting for 80 percent of all local businesses. “More than 85 percent of the Chamber’s 2,700 members have fewer than 10 employees,” says Dennis Currington, Director of Small and Minority Business Development for the Tulsa Metro Chamber.

These small businesses are also crucial to the stability of the Tulsa region, home to more than 800,000 people and over 45,000 businesses in northeastern Oklahoma’s lush “Green Country,” in the center of Tornado Alley.

For several years, the City of Tulsa’s award-winning program to foster disaster resistance and resilience, named Mayor’s Citizen Corps, has focused on strengthening planning before disaster strikes on both the public and private fronts. “We want to

become a disaster-resistant community, one that can avert disaster or bounce back quickly,” says Tim Lovell, Citizen Corps director. “The best defense against disaster is a strong, well-connected community of people and businesses helping each other.”



“For us to become a disaster-resistant community, small businesses have to stay in business,” adds Sandy Cox, a Citizen Corps volunteer who is also a leader of the *Open for Business<sup>sm</sup>* program

and the business resumption coordinator for the regional powerhouse Bank of Oklahoma. “Big businesses need to mentor small businesses to help them plan now to survive the worst. That’s what we’re trying to do.”

The team is basing its work around the national *Open for Business<sup>sm</sup>* program, which has been developed by the Institute for Business & Home Safety to help reduce businesses losses. The *Open for Business<sup>sm</sup>* toolkit includes a booklet and CD Rom, including step-by-step forms that can be filled out to document the plan. IBHS is a national nonprofit initiative of the insurance industry whose mission is to reduce the social and economic effects of natural disasters and other property losses by conducting research and advocating improved construction, maintenance and preparation practices. “The Tulsa group is developing a mentoring program that we believe can be a prototype for other communities and Chambers of Commerce,” says Diana McClure, IBHS Vice President and the national director for the IBHS *Open for Business<sup>sm</sup>* program.

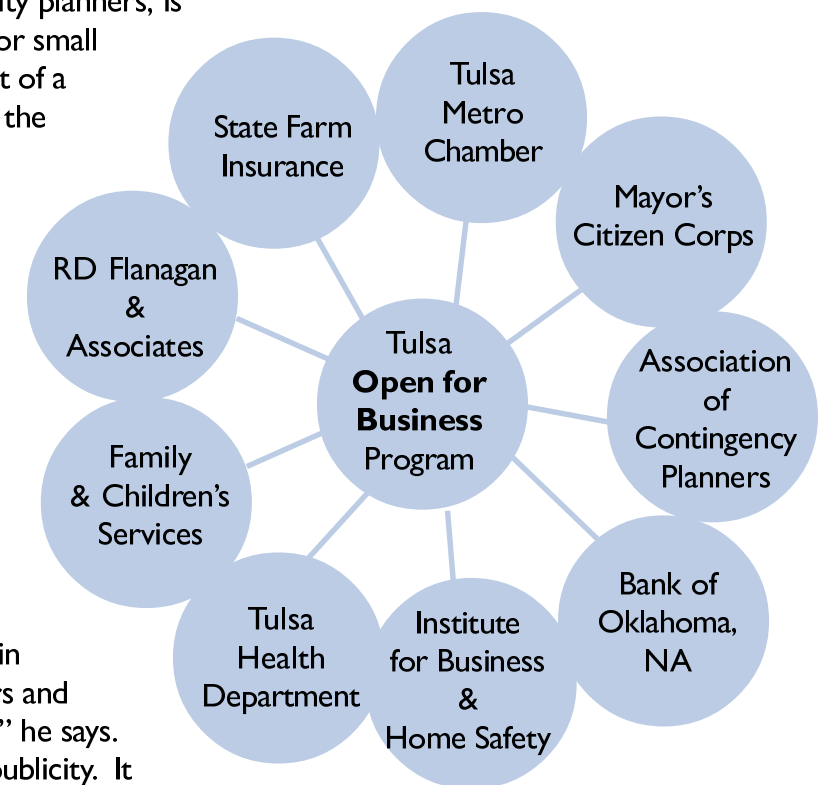
“We’re planning a major fall conference to raise awareness that it’s important and possible to plan to manage business disasters,” says Dave Hall, manager of small business programs for the State Farm Insurance Central Zone, which includes Tulsa. “We know from experience that something as small as a waterline break can derail your business unless you have a survival plan in place.”



Tim Lovell, Mayor’s Citizen Corps and Dennis Currington, Tulsa Metro Chamber discuss plans for a city-wide gathering of Tulsa area business owners to be titled “A Day Without Business, an *Open for Business* Summit”.

The Tulsa Metro Chamber is our linchpin in this effort,” says Rick Myers, president of the Oklahoma Chapter of the Association of Contingency Planners. The ACP, a national association of professional business continuity planners, is offering free mentors for small business training as part of a national partnership of the ACP with IBHS.

“There’s a huge payoff when Chambers of Commerce help small business plan to withstand disasters,” says Currington. “Working with this team and the *Open for Business<sup>sm</sup>* program gives us a marketing edge, allowing us to offer a value-added service to draw in new Chamber members and keep our existing ones,” he says. “It generates positive publicity. It helps us make connections. But most of all, we are proud to help strengthen small businesses and do our part toward creating a safer, more sustainable community.”



For more information or to download a free copy of *Open for Business<sup>sm</sup>*, visit [www.IBHS.org](http://www.IBHS.org).