

OrlandoSentinel.com

Chamber to boost disabled

An Orlando lawyer has launched the organization to help business owners promote their companies.

Sara K. Clarke

Sentinel Staff Writer

July 17, 2007

An Orlando lawyer has created the Chamber of Commerce for Persons with Disabilities Inc., which he hopes will help disabled business owners network and promote their companies.

The organization, officially launched in early June, provides free membership to businesses controlled by a person with disabilities or by someone who's a direct caregiver of a person with disabilities. The chamber will also allow disability-friendly companies to sign up as support organizations, for a fee. There will be no fee for nonprofits.

Pete Schoemann of the law firm Broad and Cassel said he came up with the idea while helping clients who were forming a foundation for autism awareness. They planned to donate a portion of their business profits to the foundation.

The father of two autistic boys, Schoemann started thinking about how to increase their profits and thereby their donations, and came up with the idea of the chamber.

While the organization is still in its infancy, Schoemann said, "Everywhere we go, people love the idea and people want to become a member."

Schoemann said that, just as people look for environmentally friendly businesses, they prefer to buy from businesses that are friendly to the disabled.

Eventually, the chamber's Web site will allow people to search businesses by location, business and disability.

"There will be people out there that will want to support certain types of disabilities," he said.

In addition to networking and promotion, the chamber wants to establish advisory boards to give members free advice. It also hopes to persuade the federal government to categorize disability-related businesses as "disadvantaged business enterprises," increasing their chances of obtaining government contracts.

Schoemann said he also hopes the chamber will one day help his sons, ages 9 and 7, live independent lives if they want to be self-employed.

For more information on the chamber, visit www.disabilitychamber.org.

Sara K. Clarke can be reached at 407-420-5664 or skclarke@orlandosentinel.com.

Copyright © 2007, [Orlando Sentinel](http://OrlandoSentinel.com)