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Frisco Chamber president: 'Dallas is our suburb'

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With its \$5 Billion Mile under construction along the Dallas North Tollway and its record of nation-leading population growth, Frisco has been on a roll, with no signs of slowing down.

One of the entities helping the city grow is the [Frisco Chamber of Commerce](#), led by [Tony Felker](#), president and CEO.

Frisco grew a whopping 32 percent between 2010 and 2015, boosting its population to 154,407. The city posted an average annual population growth of 5.32 percent, ranking first in that category as well. The Frisco Chamber has 1,300 members, which ranks it No. 5 in North Texas, according to Dallas Business Journal research.

"One of the things we talk about all the time is we're not your grandfather's chamber," Felker said. "We don't want to be viewed the way chambers have historically been viewed ... We're going to shake it up. We're going to do things differently."

What's the latest on Frisco's \$5 Billion Mile?

The last number that I saw, the figure was up to \$5.4 billion. That \$5.4 billion is if everything is built out the way everybody assumes it will be. We know some aspects won't be built out to what's planned, and others are probably going to be more than what's expected. I think when the everyday person hears about the \$5 Billion Mile and everything that's going to get built, they think that by Christmas of 2017 everything is going to be built. It's not like that. Some of these developments will be 15 or 20 years. I tend to think it will be sooner than that because most of the growth up here has had more rapid sellout and absorption than anywhere else.

How does Frisco fit into the economic development scene in North Texas?

We refer to it as co-ompetition — a mix of cooperation and competition. It's not a case of one city competing against another city and what do we get, what does Plano get and what is Rockwall getting? Texas is doing great within the whole country. The better that Frisco can do in terms of economic development, the better that Plano (and others) can do.

Do you view Frisco as a suburb of Dallas or as its own city?



JAKE DEAN

Tony Felker, president of the Frisco Chamber of Commerce

Jokingly, whenever I'm at a convention out of town or visiting folks in other states, I say "I'm from Frisco, Texas." If I get that look, I say "If you don't know where Frisco is, Dallas is our suburb 20 miles south."

What's your budget size and source?

We are currently at \$1.35 million. Dues make up about half of that, and the other half comes down to events, relocation guide, advertising, and anything and everything else.

What is topping your legislative agenda right now?

The key points are transportation, economic development. Local control is a big issue, as well as energy and education.

What is your focus on local control?

We feel that government is best exercised at the local level. That should start with the local governing body being City Council as much as possible. I always find it funny that state elected officials say "Washington, stay out of our business," but then they're very quick to turn around and tell cities what they can or cannot do, or push unfunded mandates down.

What do you see as the biggest threat to continuing the wave of growth, corporate relocations and expansions in Frisco and North Texas?

Water, which is a statewide issue. Workforce development is much more of a regional and local issue, as is transportation. Bringing people into the area is going to be a critical issue. We're at 2.4 percent unemployment in this area now, and we've got more companies coming. We need more trained workers today and we need to make sure that we've got a highly qualified and trained workforce coming in tomorrow.

Can you narrow it to one?

If I had to choose just one, I'd probably go with transportation. It is such a complicated issue. There are so many components with transportation.

What differentiates the Frisco Chamber from others?

Too often, I think, chambers of commerce have defaulted to 'we do networking, we do ribbon cuttings and we have chicken lunches.' We have made it a point that we're not going to do that. There are certain things in town that we are best suited for — advocating on behalf of our businesses, being problem solvers, lobbying on behalf of the business community, legislation — those are things that impact every single member of ours, every single business.

How did the deal with the Dallas Cowboys for The Star in Frisco come together?

That was a model where they took the deal that was in place for Toyota Stadium and said, hey, we've done this before. We've got the city that's been involved, we've got the school district that's been involved, we've got a private entity that's been involved. We can tweak this. It took about 90 days to put that whole deal together because they basically took the agreement and substituted "Cowboys" in for "FC Dallas."

ABOUT TONY FELKER

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