

## Celebrating the Past, Investing in the Future

As the Model City, Kingsport's very foundation was built with an eye to the future, while embracing the past. Just as Kingsport has planned for the future, so have Mitch Cox Companies and Universal Development & Construction. Both companies have partnered to develop and build The Villas at River Bend; a brand new residential community in Kingsport. Opening this Spring, the community will have 265 townhomes and apartments featuring modern amenities such as a resort-style saltwater swimming pool, fitness center and outdoor pavilion as well as scenic views of the Holston River. All this is coupled with a central location that makes enjoying all that Kingsport has to offer fast and convenient.



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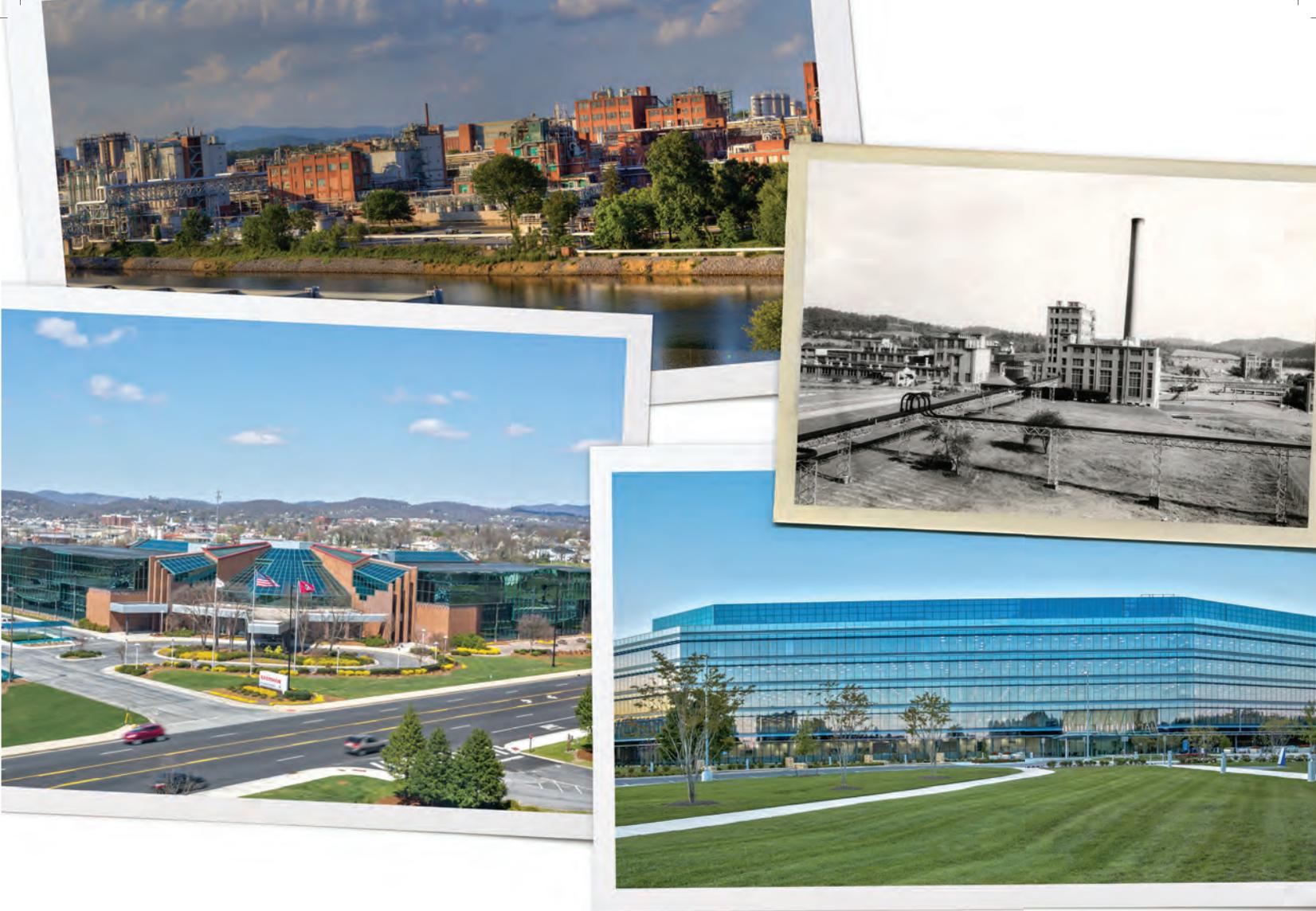
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# KINGSPORT 100

*Celebrating the Kingsport Spirit* ▶ 2017



**CELEBRATING KINGSPORT'S FIRST CENTURY  
AT THE DAWN OF THE SECOND**



# It's been a **sensational century**, Kingsport!

Eastman is proud to celebrate the centennial of the place we have called home for generations. Our company was founded just three years after the city was incorporated; and together, we have shared a rich history of community spirit and growth.

Today, we remain committed to Kingsport's bright future.

George Eastman once said, "Embrace light. Admire it. Love it. But above all, know it." We have found our light in the people of this vibrant community.

And we know it will continue to shine throughout the next century.

Visit [Responsibility.Eastman.com](https://Responsibility.Eastman.com) to learn about Eastman's Corporate Responsibility efforts.

**EASTMAN**

EMN-CC-3660 12/16



As the city's third-largest manufacturer — and fellow centenarian — Domtar is proud to welcome Kingsport to the 100 club!

Domtar's partnership with the city of Kingsport extends back to 1916, when the original mill was founded and began employing workers in the region. Since then, the city and mill have grown together,

sharing a work ethic, commitment to innovation and sense of community that have allowed both to flourish and advance.

With an employment base of approximately 400 workers expanding from the mill to the Ridgefields converting facility, plus the generation of an additional 750 indirect jobs, Domtar is proud to be a key contributor to Kingsport's growth and prosperity, providing an estimated regional economic impact of \$190 million each year.

Domtar also recognizes the importance of community involvement, and actively encourages our employees to invest in the lives of others around the region. As a result, personnel at the Kingsport Mill support more than 40 community organizations, both financially and through volunteer efforts. From the United Way to the Boys and Girls Club, FunFest, school-related programs and committees, plus a host of other community-minded causes, Domtar employees demonstrate a vested interest in the Kingsport area.

The Kingsport Mill would not be where it is today without the support we have received from this great city and its residents. We look forward to continuing our vital partnership over the next 100 years, and far beyond.

BILL MACPHERSON



Mitch Cox Companies and Universal Development & Construction (UDC) are honored to celebrate with Kingsport in its Centennial Celebration. Kingsport became the Model City with the help of passionate, visionary residents and city leaders who understood the planning required to shape the city's future from its original settlement in the 1800's. In this spirit, Mitch Cox Companies and UDC are proud to partner with the Model City to design and build The Villas at River Bend, a new planned and amenity rich residential community.

The Villas at River Bend is conveniently located off Fort Henry Drive with a scenic view of

the Holston River and will provide Kingsport residents the perfect place to call home while they shape their own future. This project is an opportunity to create a residential community that provides living spaces with modern

amenities adjacent to shopping, dining and unprecedented outdoor recreation areas for current and future Kingsport residents. This new 265-unit townhome and apartment community is currently under development with the first units available for lease this Spring.

Mitch Cox Companies and UDC have collaborated on residential communities in the Tri-Cities for over a decade. The Villas at River Bend is our first development in partnership with the City of Kingsport and we look forward to more opportunities to work with this historic city.

Thank you, Kingsport, for the opportunity to join in your vision for the future of the city and begin our partnership working together.

MITCH COX

SHANE ABRAHAM

# THANK YOU

for allowing ECU to share

**THOUSANDS of  
EXTRAORDINARY MEMORIES**

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Eastman Credit Union realizes the importance of community. It's a value our founding fathers instilled in our organization back in 1934. Over the years, ECU has given back almost \$6.3 million to community organizations and over \$92 million to our members through our Extraordinary Dividend. Building community, giving back, going above and beyond...it's how we do business.

Today, we have more than 700 employees in the regions we serve and approximately 180,000 members world-wide, but most of them are right here in Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. We've had the opportunity to share memories with generations of Kingsport families and help make dreams...realities. Thank you for letting us be part of your lives, and we look forward to a bright future ahead.

Olan O. Jones, CEO/President ECU

*Your savings federally insured to at least \$250,000 and backed by the full faith and credit of the National Credit Union Administration, a U.S. Government Agency.*

**ECU BESIDE YOU**



**EASTMAN  
CREDIT  
UNION®**

# KINGSPORT 100

*Celebrating the Kingsport Spirit* ▶ 2017

With the river and the rails as our companions, we built our home upon a willingness to work, an ability to think, steady hands, and steadfast faith. People who visited could feel the difference as much as see it. And those who stayed long enough became a part of it. Long before our articles of incorporation, the Cherokee felt its pull. It called them here to gather in community with both neighbor and stranger. And it does the same now. Imbued with a practical optimism, emboldened by a can-do creativity, and enlightened through an everyday selflessness, it is the Kingsport Spirit. And it is what we have come to celebrate.

There is something deep within us that loves to celebrate. Maybe it's because celebrations allow us to remember the things in life that truly matter, or maybe it's just having time to enjoy the best things in life with people we love. Whatever its origin, celebration enables us to pause and discover over and over again who we are, where we're from, and how much we have been blessed. In its truest form, celebration is simply an expression of gratefulness. Kingsport is a grateful community, and we are ever grateful to be a part of it. We hope you will join us, along with both neighbor and stranger, in coming together throughout this year to help celebrate Kingsport's 100th birthday!

Over the past couple of years, we have had the great pleasure of working with the two dozen individuals who make up the Centennial Commission. These community members, along with many other volunteers, have worked tirelessly to make the Centennial celebration events both engaging and inclusive. We welcome participation by anyone who is interested in joining the celebration. If you would like to register an event, learn more about our City's history, find Centennial merchandise, or get involved in any aspect of the Centennial celebration, please visit [www.kingsport100.org](http://www.kingsport100.org). In the meantime, make sure to put the remaining signature event dates of March 2, July 4, and November 17 on your calendar. More information about these events, as well as many others, is available on the website.

Throughout the year, we will honor those whose vision, leadership, courage, intelligence, talent and dedication have enabled our City to be a community of choice. In other words, we will honor each other. And as we celebrate past accomplishments and mark historic milestones, we will no doubt find ourselves mindful that we live in a community that also works together to build a promising future. Indicative of the Kingsport Spirit, our community continues to be a place that gives generously and speaks humbly. The Centennial Park Project in downtown Kingsport is the latest example of these unique traits. And as part of the celebration, the completion of Centennial Park during our centennial year will once again serve to honor the past and engage the future.

Perhaps the best thing about a celebration of any kind is the opportunity to gather with one another around a common joy. This year is our opportunity to share that common joy and renew our communal spirit. Besides when there is something to celebrate, we should celebrate. So please join us as Kingsport celebrates its 100th year!



Jeff + CeeGee McCord

JEFF AND CEEGEE MCCORD

# KINGSPORT 100

*Celebrating the Kingsport Spirit* ▶ 2017



**H**appy 100th Birthday Kingsport! I am very honored to be your Mayor of this great city, and serving our citizens during the centennial year is a dream come true for me.

Kingsport is a special place with special people. Over the last 100 years, citizens of every walk of life have worked to build this city. It is the strong foundation they have built that

propels us towards the next one hundred years. We embrace progress, and we embrace our neighbors. We continue to maintain our small town feel with big city opportunities for all our citizens.

I would like to extend a very important thank you to *The Business Journal* for taking on this major project for the centennial. The Kingsport100 special issue is a great way to tell Kingsport's story through the lens of our businesses, one of our strongest sectors. The careful

weaving of stories describing how we overcome, how we collaborate, and how we achieve makes me proud to live in Kingsport. These stories will live on forever now.

As Mayor, I have the best job because on any given day, the Board of Mayor and Alderman have the opportunity to recognize citizens and organizations for their achievements and community spirit. The Kingsport spirit of teamwork combined with an aim high and can-do mindset has driven us for decades, resulting in a very high quality of life for all Kingsport citizens to enjoy and for businesses to grow and prosper. I'm grateful we are sharing these wonderful stories.

Congratulations Kingsport on a wonderful and prosperous 100 years.

JOHN CLARK



**K**ingsport's centennial is a year to remember the impact this city has had on so many lives.

We're unique and we're authentic. I've always remembered Kingsport as a place where community mattered. I didn't know what to call it at the time, but now I know it's the Kingsport Spirit. For me, that spirit is the sense of pride

I have while building a model city. When I was 12 years old, I began drawing cities and I still even have some of the sketches in a notebook. I never thought I would have the chance to work in my hometown, but I feel very blessed to have the opportunity.

My mom is from Hawkins County, my dad from Southwest Virginia. They came to Kingsport seeking a better life for their children and grandchildren. Citizens of this new town came from nearby and faraway. It was an early melting pot of diversity from around the world – people with a common goal – to build a better future.

March 2nd isn't just Kingsport's birthday, it's also my son's. Just like his mother, sister, and I, he was born at Holston Valley Hospital. He reaped the benefit of one of the many institutions that were envisioned, planned and funded by the Kingsport Spirit. And so goes the circle of life. Our family, like so many others, inherited a city with exceptional schools, incredible parks, strong volunteerism, charitable conviction, civic-minded businesses, an infectious community pride, and a can-do attitude.

Jim Harlan, chair of the Kingsport Community

Foundation said, "You're here today because someone came before you to lay the groundwork...someone helped you... someone prayed for you – and it's your responsibility to do the same for those to come."

When you think about the odds this fledgling city faced, the Kingsport Spirit is even more pronounced. In 1910, developers set out to build a city. Four years later, World War I broke out. Twelve years later, the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began. Ten years later, World War II consumed the globe again.

At every turn, in any situation, Kingsport citizens have risen to the occasion.

Whether it be the groundbreaking founding of Douglass High School in 1928, the Santa Train in 1942, Bays Mountain Park in 1971, Fun Fest in 1980, Kingsport Tomorrow in 1989, MeadowView Convention Center in 1996, the Academic Village in 2002, the Kingsport Carousel in 2010, the PEAK young professionals in 2013, or the recent OneKingsport Summit – Kingsport is willing to dream – it's willing to work – and it's willing to leave a legacy.

I consider it one of life's greatest blessings to be able to give back to the place that made, shaped, and nurtured – me.

Thank you *Business Journal* – for your interest in producing a centennial publication, taking the opportunity to share Kingsport's progress over the last 100 years. This special issue will be a keepsake from now on. Thank you for telling our story so well.

JEFF FLEMING

# KINGSPORT 100

*Celebrating the Kingsport Spirit* ▶ 2017

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*The Business Journal of Tri-Cities, TN/VA* extends gratitude to the following individuals for their assistance, without which this publication could not have been issued. Some provided photographs. Others provided historical documents. A few provided both. Each made valuable contributions to what we hope will be a lasting legacy of Kingsport's first century.

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*The Business Journal of Tri-Cities, TN/VA* offers special thanks to Jane Crawford of the Rotary Club of Kingsport and Brianne Wright of the Archives of the City of Kingsport. The majority of the photography in these pages comes from their organizations, and their continuous assistance in bringing our staff together with accounts and images you will see in this publication went above and beyond the call of their stations.

Cover photo by Rob Beverly

# FOND MEMORIES GROWING UP IN KINGSPORT!

By Bill Derby, Publisher, *The Business Journal of Tri-Cities TN/VA*



Congratulations to the city of Kingsport on the 100-year anniversary of its founding and the Centennial Celebration, 'Kingsport 100.' Reaching this historic milestone is a tribute to the vision of the city fathers a century ago. Little did they know their contributions and strong vision would contribute in a significant way to growing Kingsport into a vibrant community

that can boast a long and rich history with many remarkable achievements.

Not only has Kingsport contributed to Tennessee and America, it now plays a significant role in international progress and products created here and abroad. Kingsport's huge success is due to the incredible planning efforts of community leaders past and present. Excellence in education, industrial growth, advocacy and networking have lead to phenomenal growth in technology, medicine, communications, research, and recreation that connect Kingsport to the world.

Congratulations to those who have worked so hard on this celebration. The quality of life citizens enjoy has been greatly enhanced by their dedication and contributions.

Since I am a Kingsport native born in Holston Valley Community Hospital more than a few decades ago I am extremely proud and honored for our company to have been selected to publish 'Kingsport 100.' My dad was employed by Pet Dairy on Konnarock Rd. for a number of years. Growing up in Kingsport in the 1950's was wonderful.

Our family lived on Crescent Drive and later, Broad Street. My older sister, Marcia, and I made many friends in those neigh-

borhoods. Our house at the top of Broad Street was next door to the Judge Gillenwater family with whom we shared a driveway. It was an easy bicycle ride downhill around Church Circle into town. Many a Saturday was spent going to a movie then running through Dobyns-Taylor, W.B. Greene Company or visiting Wallace News Stand for a coke and bag of Fritos, a 10-cent investment.

We rode our bikes everywhere, many times ending up in the field next to the Snodgrass home on Ravine Street to play a sandlot football game or have a little more dangerous BB gun fight. The Snodgrass boys were a bad influence at times. However, I'm betting they all turned out well.

My fondest recollections of Kingsport involved horses. The Backer Stables were located just over the hill off Gibson Mill Road and across Reedy Creek. For a couple of summers I tried to visit the stables every day. One cute gal asked me to help her clean out a few stables. She then told me if I would finish the job she would let me ride her beautiful palomino horse. I jumped at the chance but couldn't figure out why they were laughing at me. After a sweaty hour dodging horse flies I soon realized I had been set up. Although, she did let me ride her horse, I got the short end of that stick. Great memories for a kid growing up in a great town.

What lies ahead for Kingsport? Who knows what progress our communities will experience during the next 25, 50 years? It's exciting to envision.

We hope you enjoy this publication. Our goal was to include as much as possible from past business historical moments to the current.

And thank you to our business community and advertisers who have supported this city event and publication. Let's celebrate 'Kingsport 100.' It's a party for all to enjoy!



**Cowboy crazy in the 1950's. Mom paid the photographer for my photo atop his pony at our house on Crescent Drive.**

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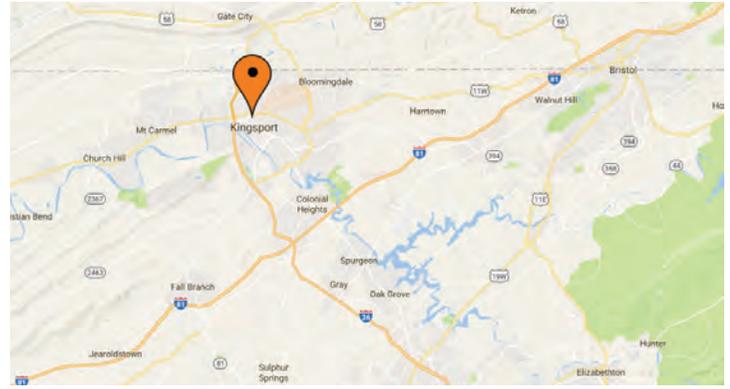
**K**ingsport is an easy city to sell to most advanced manufacturing projects, especially those within our key targeted sectors. It is also a prime candidate for regional headquarters and sales offices.

The city has tremendous schools including the Downtown Academic Village so obtaining a skilled workforce is not a problem; the Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) is a tremendous differentiating advantage in particular. Not only does it provide state-of-the-art, customized training, it demonstrates our ability to participate in meaningful public private partnerships.

We have great transportation infrastructure, highlighted by having interstates 81 and 26 intersecting in Kingsport along Tri-Cities Airport. We also have great water capacity, low-cost, reliable power, and redundant high-speed fiber.

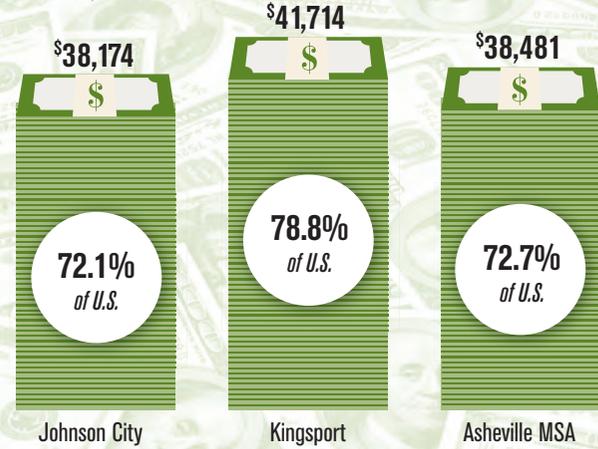
Finally, but significantly, Kingsport is a pro-business city located in a pro-business state. We value advanced manufacturing; in fact, our city was built on it. Companies know they will be welcomed and valued here and our elected leadership will move mountains – sometimes literally – to ensure their success.

SEE YOU ARE HERE, 12



## AVERAGE WAGE COMPARISON

United States \$52,937



# THANK YOU KINGSPORT

100 Years of Helping Bright Minds Achieve Bright Futures

Citi proudly recognizes our local business and non-profit partners who reflect the *Kingsport Spirit!*



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# A heritage of caring. A legacy of excellence.



Holston Valley Medical Center has served Kingsport since 1935. Whether you were born here, healed here or both, this hospital is part of our community's history – and you are a part of ours.

We host Kingsport's only Level I trauma center, where we tend to the region's most critical injuries, as well as its only neonatal intensive care unit, which was recently renovated to provide state-of-the-art care for sick and premature babies – even those born as young as 24 weeks.

Staffed with experienced, compassionate physicians and co-workers, Holston Valley stands ready to care for you and your family – today, tomorrow and beyond.

**How has Holston Valley changed your life?  
Let us know at [wellmont.org/MyStory](http://wellmont.org/MyStory).**



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# Number of Kingsport Employees by Category



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 2017

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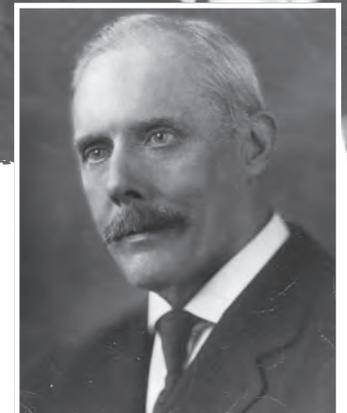
Bank of Tennessee congratulates Kingsport on its 100 years of success! We are proud to share in the city's accomplishments, from our support of the restoration of the Netherland Inn, an iconic piece of the area's history, to placing our newest office in the heart of downtown. We look forward to continuing our rewarding partnership with Kingsport. Here's to the next 100 years!

[BankofTennessee.com](http://BankofTennessee.com)

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Kingsport's founding fathers included (L-R) J. Fred Johnson, James S. Havens, George Eastman, Herbert Williamson, John B. Dennis, Perley S. Wilcox and Frank Lovejoy. The city was first envisioned by George L. Carter (inset).



## KINGSPORT: BORN OF INDUSTRY

By Scott Robertson

*"Things do not just happen. No territory ordinarily grows of its own right in these days when all communities are striving for growth. A vast amount of effort must be made; great expenditures must be entailed. To build up a local industry a start is usually made from the zero lines."*

– O.K. Morgan, construction engineer, Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railway

**I**n the beginning, there were the rocks and the trees, the people and the railroad. All were critical to the birth and growth of Kingsport.

The rocks and trees gave the raw material necessary for industry. Their rich chemistry yielded compounds sought by the construction, chemical and paper industries, the very industries that form the basis of the city's economy today, 100 years after the city's founding.

The people were the engine that drove production. Inoculated against organized labor by the region's relative isolation and possessed of a strong work ethic, they were ready to be the backbone of a quick-growing economy.

The railroad was the delivery method, bringing wood and stone from the mountains of southwest Virginia, western North Carolina and Tennessee – then carrying manufactured products to markets around the country.

The railroad, however, was more than that just a medium of transport. Its executives provided the vision to build a city on the foundation of industry.

George L. Carter, John B. Dennis and J. Fred Johnson all played key roles in the founding of Kingsport. On August 17, 1905, the *Johnson City Comet* newspaper published a story that the Unaka Corporation, a Carter holding, planned "to boom a town at Kingsport." In addition to Unaka, Carter also owned the South



**This Kingsport map, circa 1920, shows locations of the Holston Corp., Clinchfield Portland Cement Co., Kingsport Brick Corp., Federal Dye Stuff and Chemical Co., and Kingsport Pulp Co. The commercial and residential zones are virtually identical today.**

and Western Railway Co., and had long planned to strike a rail line through southern Appalachia, which had been isolated by other railways' decisions to build circuitous lines around southwest Virginia and northeast Tennessee to the north or south.

Just as that notice appeared in *The Comet*, however, Carter found himself involved in costly court battles. He was forced to travel to New York to seek funding from outside financiers. A group including Dennis, Thomas Fortune Ryan and James Blair traveled to northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia to explore the region by horseback and determine for themselves if a rail line were a potentially viable venture. On March 7, 1908, the South and Western Railway was rechartered as the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railway. Carter would remain associated with the railway until 1911, when he would resign as chief executive to be replaced by Mark Potter.

The CC&O's financial interests were, according to a history of the line's role in the formation of Kingsport written by CC&O Vice President Edward Bailly, "principally directed by the then-well-known and leading private banking firm of Blair and Co., and the partner in that firm who was in charge of the matter was John B.

Dennis, who was without doubt the leading spirit in the development of the present City of Kingsport, and who afterwards became President and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railway."

It was Dennis, according to Bailly, who foresaw the possibility of not just a town, but an industrial city at Kingsport. Dennis and his partners formed other corporations to capitalize on that potential. Some of those corporations were owned by the CC&O, others by the individuals who comprised the ownership of the CC&O, but under separate charter.

The Holston Corporation owned industrial sites. It in turn was owned by the railway. Kingsport Farms, the Kingsport Improvement Co., and the Kingsport Corporation were owned by the railway's interested parties.

Under Carter, the railway had hired chemist and geologist Charles Catlett to investigate the potential output of raw materials in the Kingsport area. Catlett filed positive reports on the possibilities

SEE INDUSTRY, 16



**Top: This photo from the archives of Eastman Chemical Co., shows early loggers. Both Eastman and Mead (below) would harvest immense quantities of trees for use as raw materials. Locals called wood bound for Tennessee Eastman, “chemical wood.”**

## INDUSTRY, CONTINUED

for cement, brick, tannic acid and wood pulp.

With Catlett’s reports in hand, the railway then authorized many more specific studies and began to plan a city with several industrial plants, each complementary to the others, and all with external customers who would need the railway to ship product from Kingsport to their locations.

C.K. Morgan, a construction engineer for CC&O recalled the meticulous research and reporting methodology employed by the railway’s agents and the recruiting effort their discoveries drove. “The resources of the Clinchfield were virtually card indexed by engineers, geologists, chemists and experts of all lines, working at the behest and under the direction of the industrial department of the railroad. With data in hand, then began the dissemination of this information and quest for prospects that might be interested and available. Some were interested in mining coal, ores, kaolin, and feldspar; others in the manufacture of timber, brick, cement, tile, etc.”

Of all Catlett’s reports, the cement and brick report of August, 1909 showed the most immediate promise, and samples were sent from the area around the Long Island on the Holston River to laboratories in Pittsburgh.



The labs confirmed that, “both from practical and theoretical evidence, the raw materials at Kingsport are well suited for making Portland Cement of the best grade.”

The effort to bring a cement company to Kingsport met with success despite the fact that there was no actual city yet. The quality of the raw materials convinced John Miller of the Dexter Portland Cement Co., of Nazareth, Pa., to build a plant in Kingsport in 1910, with the railroad providing shipments of coal to power the plant at 50 cents per ton. By 1915 the plant was producing 5,000 barrels a day and in 1917 Miller purchased an additional 35 acres from the railroad near Gate City.

Catlett himself had brought two Georgia-based investors to the railway in 1910 with the idea of building a brick manufacturing plant. A contract between Holston Corporation and those two men, identified in court papers as J. Whitaker of Atlanta and F. Mahan of Rome was signed and the Kingsport Brick Corporation was formed, mainly owned by officials and representatives of the CC&O. The plant would begin operating eight kilns, but quickly double its capacity to manufacture 100,000 bricks per day.

Kingsport was just a village, but it was already showing the kind of success that would attract the other industries Dennis had envisioned.

In 1915, the railway’s industrial recruitment efforts brought Robert T. Grant to the table to make use of the wood so easily accessible to a Kingsport site. A 20-acre site north of the brick and cement plants was made available through the railway’s subsidiaries for the purpose of building a tannic extraction plant. The Kingsport Extraction Corporation was born, quickly followed by the Kingsport Tannery, Inc., which had the same officers. Those firms would eventually become the Slip-Not Belting Corp.

Around the same time, the owners of the Columbia Paper Mill in Bristol decided to expand their operations in the area. Being familiar with the raw material supply in the region, they entered into an agreement with the railway that led to the 1916 creation of the Kingsport Pulp Corporation. Its plant started out with an output of around 40 tons of pulp per day.

The Mead Paper Co., of Dayton, Ohio, was an early partner in Kingsport Pulp. A 1913 letter about Catlett’s timber report sent from J. Fred Johnson, who was still involved in optioning land for the railway, to L.H. Phetteplace of Erwin said, “I think the plans now under consideration by Mr. Mead, in whose interest Mr. Allen is visiting our line, contemplate a very much larger installation than was thought of at the time Mr. Catlett and Mr. Embree had the proposition under consideration.”

Indeed, Mead was interested in more, buying out its partners in the pulp operation in 1920. The Kingsport mill produced only



**John B. Dennis**

soda pulp until 1923. At that time, Mead built a full paper mill adjacent to the pulp mill. Mead eliminated its cost of having pulp shipped from the city, while the railway replaced its pulp shipments out of Kingsport with paper shipments.

Not all potential industries panned out, of course. A March 1917 article in a Washington, D.C. journal states that Decamp Glass Casket Co., with a capital stock of \$1 million, planned to locate a plant in Kingsport, offering employment to nearly 500 people. By Feb. 19, 1918, Decamp Glass Casket was defending itself in front of the Tennessee Supreme Court.

But for the most part, Dennis’ vision of an industrial city came together nicely. Alongside all the industrial development, the people who manned the plants needed essential services. In 1915, Dennis tabbed Johnson, a brother-in-law of George Carter, to run

**SEE INDUSTRY, 18**

## INDUSTRY, CONTINUED

point in building the city itself.

Johnson, who had originally come to the railway when Blair & Co bought the commissaries he had operated along the line, did so under the auspices of the Kingsport Improvement Corp. Perhaps the most accurate explanation of Johnson's role for the next 30 years in Kingsport, if not the most pleasing to the ear, is "one-man chamber of commerce," a title given Johnson posthumously by historian Margaret Ripley Wolfe in her seminal work, "Kingsport Tennessee: A Planned American City."

Johnson fostered what he referred to as the Kingsport Spirit. He maintained that Kingsport had a unique opportunity to be something more than just another American town. He defined that spirit as "a willingness to submerge selfish interests beneath the individual effort to assure the greater good for the greater number." He would encourage other businessmen to take up that philosophy in their dealings in the city, and discourage those who chose not to abide by it. There is one anecdote, perhaps apocryphal, for we could not find confirmation of it, that Johnson turned down a Christmas dinner invitation from the owners of a business that planned to build housing for their



**Without the Carolina, Clinchfield & Ohio Railway, there would be no Kingsport.**

employees, but without running water.

Dennis also hired Dr. John Nolen of Cambridge, Mass., to plan the layout of the city. Nolen's charge was to create a blueprint for a city of up to 50,000 people. A street grid and general zoning grid



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were required of Nolen, and as time went on, he and Johnson would work together, although not always in perfect harmony, to create a model city.

One key to the development of the city was the inclusion of open spaces for not just industry and service businesses, but also for civic buildings that would later prove necessary such as schools, churches and a hospital. The first hospital would not be built until 1935, but it went precisely where Nolen had envisioned it 20 years prior.

Dennis also wanted residential areas to be built on higher ground, both to provide for “a more attractive outlook” but also to provide for better drainage. Utilities including water, sewer and electricity were part of the plan. Originally power had been supplied to the town by the same plant used to power the cement plant. However in 1917 Kingsport Utilities, Inc. was formed by railroad-interested parties to create its own plant. Kingsport Utilities operated that plant until American Gas and Electric was recruited to take possession of it and run it under the auspices of Appalachian Electric Power.

The first draft of the charter for the city itself was written by CC&O general counsel Hugh Morrison in cooperation with assistance from H. Ray Dennis. The document that would eventually be sent to the state for approval was prepared by Judge Hugh Morison and F.M. Kelly. Dennis, Johnson and Nolen vetted it. It was then sent to the Bureau of Municipal Research at the Rockefeller Foundation in New York for further advice. Among the ideas included was the council-manager form of city government. Kingsport would become the first city in Tennessee to adopt that form of governance.

Finally, the proposed charter was submitted to the Tennessee General Assembly, where it would become Senate Bill No. 450, and be passed on Feb. 28, 1917. Governor Tom C. Rye signed it on March 2, 1917.

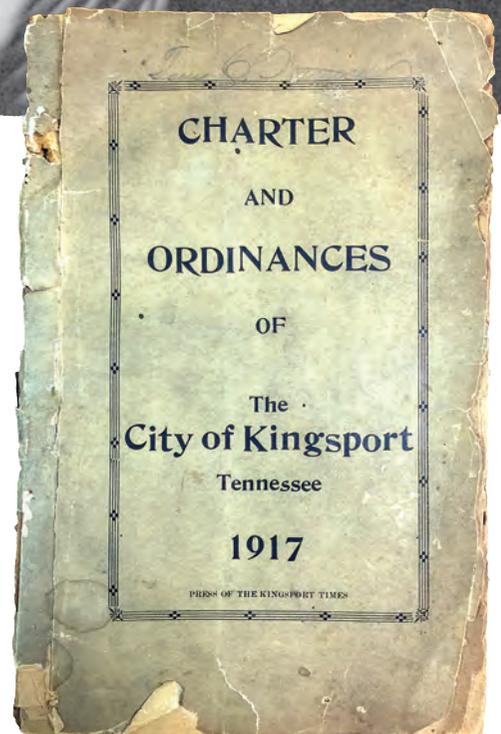
Before we leave the discussion of Kingsport’s origins as an industry-based city to examine more recent developments, one other industrial recruitment should be acknowledged. The first company to invest in a Kingsport plant after the end of World War I was Eastman Kodak Co. The company purchased 50 acres from the Holston Corporation for a wood distillation plant with the goal of producing methanol, or wood alcohol for use in the manufacture of camera film.

The newly formed Tennessee Eastman Corp. (later Tennessee Eastman Co.) acquired 40,000 acres of timber land in Tennessee and three neighboring states and began to produce not only methanol, but wood oil, charcoal and acetic acid. Today, Eastman Chemical Co., is the single largest employer in Kingsport.



**J. Fred Johnson**

**A copy of the charter and original ordinances of the City of Kingsport housed at the Archives of the City of Kingsport in the J. Fred Johnson Library.**





The MeadowView Conference, Resort and Convention Center was the first major economic engine to draw widespread support from the business community after what one mayor referred to as “a period of discord.”

# BEYOND THE MODEL CITY

MeadowView: Giving Kingsport a reason to reunite

By Scott Robertson and Don Fenley

Kingsport’s founding fathers, John B. Dennis, J. Fred Johnson and their contemporaries, had given their model city both vision and mission. But cities are not companies, and a succession plan was lacking. Johnson died in 1944. Dennis passed away in 1947.

It was not immediately apparent to what extent they would be missed, but retrospection shows that between the late 1950s and the early 1990s, Kingsport gradually lost the unity of purpose commensurate with being a model city. The economy continued to grow, albeit not at a “magic city” pace. Yet more and more, as business leaders did what was in their own company’s best interest with less concern for the city as a whole, Kingsport began to feel like any other city.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the cooperative spirit on which the city had prided itself seemed to be diminishing. It was a difficult challenge for the city to overcome. The Chamber of Commerce created a summer festival, FunFest, to give residents

an opportunity to put aside their differences and enjoy each other’s company. Community unity, once a natural hallmark of the city, had become another product needing to be manufactured.

Then, on Dec. 17, 1991, the beginning of a broader solution appeared. A Colorado investor named Glen Maddox told the Kingsport Board of Mayor and Aldermen he was interested in working with the city to build a hotel and conference center. It seemed a golden opportunity to restore some of the luster the city had been lacking. Kingsport citizens had set “opening a convention center” as one of the goals at the Kingsport 2017 community visioning sessions of 1989.

Within two months of first contact with Maddox, the BMA had approved a resolution calling for a referendum on a quarter-cent sales tax increase to fund construction of the conference center. The vote was set for May 19, 1992. A week before the vote, Maddox announced he would build a Hilton Hotel in Kingsport if voters

passed the referendum. They did so by a better than 2-to-1 margin.

The city entered into a memorandum of understanding with Maddox and the BMA approved a \$20 million bond sale. Eastman Chemical Co., got into the act, offering to sell the MeadowView Golf Course location to develop alongside the project. All appeared to be going well for many months. Then in May 1993, Maddox asked for a meeting with Eastman executives to discuss a proposal for the company to guarantee booking a specified number of rooms annually. It was seen as a red flag.

Within a month, Eastman and the city terminated talks with Maddox. Later, Alderman Ken Maness would say, "What we probably didn't do with Maddox was ask the tough questions early enough. It was never clear if he had the resources to do the deal."

The summer passed with the deal, at least in most minds, dead.

However, having had their appetite whet, and with potential funding from a tax hike already approved, the BMA decided to restart the process, only with a developer of the city's choosing. On Sept. 7, 1993 the BMA appointed a six-member hotel task force. Maness and City Manager Pete Connet represented the city. Steven Kramer, vice president and general counsel for AFG Industries represented the Kingsport Chamber of Commerce and the economic development council. Michael O'Neill, director of Communications and Public Affairs for Eastman also represented the chamber, as did Lynn Shipley, president of First American Bank in the Tri-Cities market. Bodie Scott, president of SAFECO Inc., rounded out the task force, representing Kingsport Tomorrow.

The public could be said to have had a "once bitten, twice shy" attitude toward the project. "This group was positive it could find a good developer," Scott remembered, "but nobody in the community was."

That being the case, the task force was eager to get the process back behind closed doors. That suited the potential developers as well. "One developer said very clearly that they wouldn't come to the table if there was public access to the information," said Shipley, who had been president of the chamber when the task

**INSIDE: Exide's production start-up accelerates . . . . . page 18**

# the Business Journal

Serving Upper East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia

JUNE 1994 THE REGION'S BUSINESS LEADER S2

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**DEVELOPMENT**

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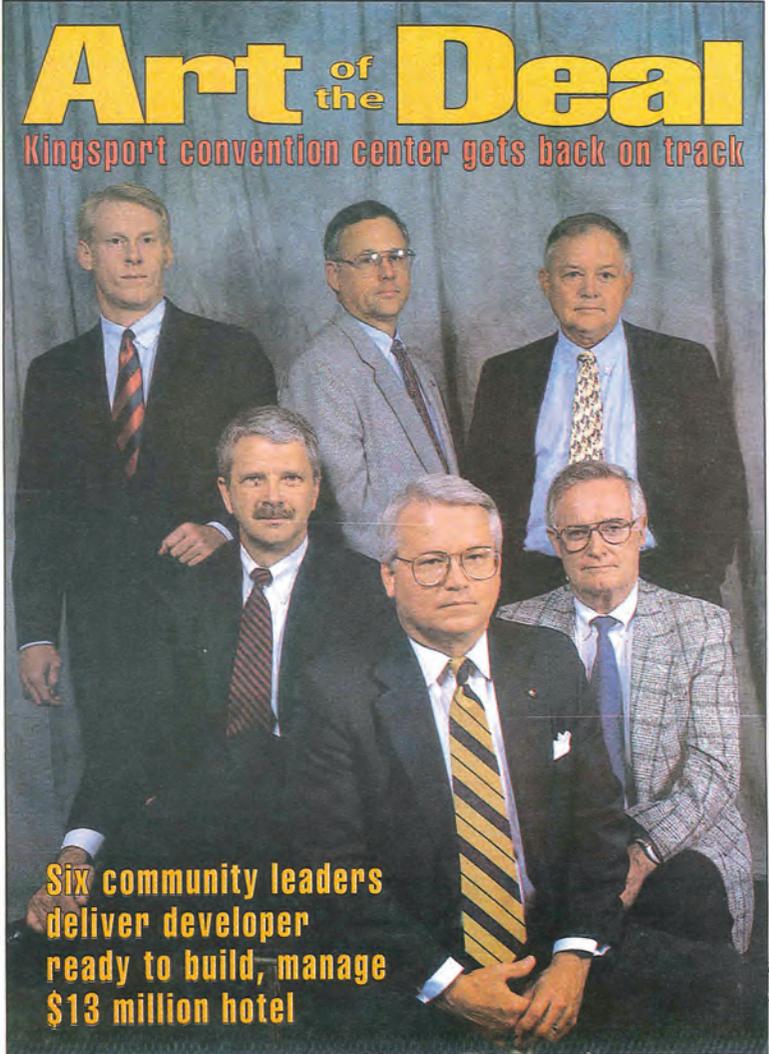
**RADIO**

**CHART BREAKER**  
WXBQ-FM climbs to the top of the Arbitron charts with help from country music's charm. **Page 38**

**REAL ESTATE**

**MAXIMUM DENSITY**  
Brookside Industrial Park has gotten full on small business. Still others will move in this year. **Page 55**





**The Business Journal Serving Upper East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia chronicled the work of the hotel task force in June 1994.**

force was formed.

Fifteen developers expressed some level of interest. A private label developer from Springfield, Mo., wanted to build a 225-room hotel. A Texas developer who worked with Hilton, Omni and Raddison wanted to build a hotel with the same number of rooms. A Raddison developer out of Atlanta pitched a 180-200 room facility while a Hyatt-attached developer from South Carolina said he wanted to build a 200-225 room hotel, even going so far as to bring golf course designer Tom Fazio to meet with the task force.

In the end, the task force went with Acquest Realty Advisors out of Bloomfield Hills, Mich., and its 200-room Marriott proposal.

SEE MODEL CITY, 22



Ground was broken for the new hotel and convention center August 23, 1994. One year earlier the project had been considered dead.

**MODEL CITY, CONTINUED**

At the time, Acquest had just finished building a hotel in Midland, Mich., a town the economy of which was dominated by a chemical company and whose airport was named (and we are not making this up) Tri-City Airport.

The task force only had the authority to make a recommendation to the BMA. It could not do the deal itself. The task force could, however, make sure the BMA was in the best position possible, and with Acquest, things just seemed to fall into place. "If we had to wave a magic wand," Shipley said, "we couldn't have gotten any better than this deal."

The task force was determined to make sure it didn't repeat the mistakes made with Maddox. The task force stayed at Acquest's Midland hotel and examined its books. Each side impressed the other with a professional approach to the deal, Connet said.

After much negotiation, it was decided that Acquest would bring in Marriott's conference center management division to manage the hotel, convention center and golf course – and to open a marketing center for the property a year before opening. The city would get the national hotel flag it had sought from the beginning. Finally, Acquest insisted the project be audited by an outside accounting firm since public and private funds would be involved.

Eastman re-entered the picture as an investor to make the deal work. The company would own the hotel, while the city of Kingsport would own the meeting space. The city ended up investing \$25.7 million in the deal, all of which would be paid off within 11 years of MeadowView's 1996 grand opening. There have been two separate \$15 million additions to the facility since then.

**SEE MODEL CITY, 24**

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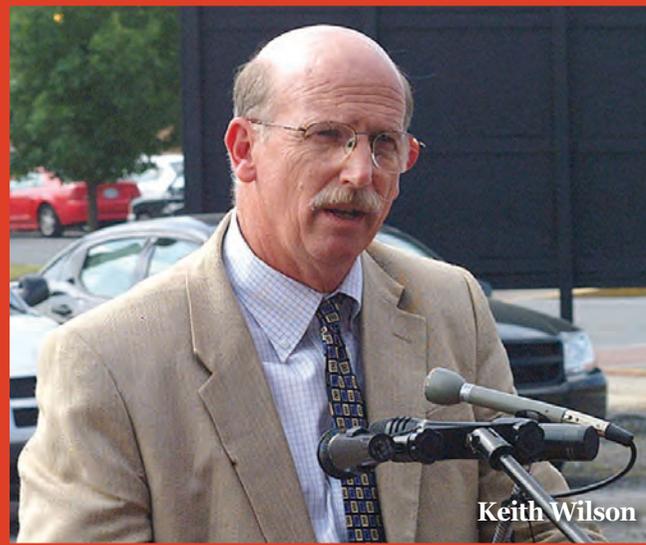
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Dr. Bill Locke



Jeanette Blazier



Keith Wilson



Dennis Phillips

## MODEL CITY, CONTINUED

According to figures released by the city, MeadowView currently produces an annual impact of \$29 million, including having raised property values in the area \$129 million since opening. MeadowView has facilitated a 324 percent rise in the city's hotel/motel revenues since it opened, and has helped double the number of visitors to Kingsport in the last 20 years.

If MeadowView didn't spawn the rebirth of the Kingsport Spirit, it at least made headway in that regard. The Kingsport 2017 visioning process had found the city to be "stodgy and unimaginative" in 1989. The success of MeadowView would help give leaders the confidence to take the next step in reviving the Kingsport Spirit a few years later: the Downtown Academic Village.

## THE DOWNTOWN ACADEMIC VILLAGE

*Bringing Kingsport's workforce into the city's second century*

The Downtown Academic Village is a newcomer when one looks at the broad sweep of Kingsport's first 100 years. But that doesn't

diminish its impact in an era when tectonic economic and demographic changes are shaking the foundation of the city, region and nation.

Some outside observers saw Kingsport's effort to start a post-secondary education cluster downtown as simply an attempt to kill two birds with one stone: downtown needed revitalization and Kingsport was the largest city in Tennessee without a four-year college or university. There was, and remains today, more to it than that.

The Kingsport area had a long, well-established reputation as having a solid, blue-collar middle-class economy where you almost had to have a plan to fail. It was a reliable ethos where students could graduate high school, get a job at one of the major local plants and settle in to begin living the American Dream. Lifetime jobs were the norm, and the best of the big local employers exerted a paternalistic manner.

For many of those who left the area for college or other jobs, Kingsport exerted a pull that drew them back when they retired or when they could return and start their own businesses. But demographics coupled with the growing bad health effects and the disruptive forces of technology were quietly at work to change all of that.

Between 1946 and 1990 the U.S. economy trudged through nine recessions. And what followed the Great Recession was more

of a restructuring than a recovery. Also, during the late 1990s the rate that technology began eating into the number of workers at local manufacturing plants began to increase. Tasks that used to demand 10-15 workers were accomplished by one or two people.

That and other economic forces came to a head in the late 1990s just as many of the oldest Baby Boomers were reaching early retirement age. Those who achieved retirement in those early days were the lucky ones. What followed were buyouts, cutbacks and layoffs that put many senior workers in the position of going back to school to upgrade their skills or take jobs at a fraction of what they were used to making.

A precursor to the groundswell of local manufacturing downsiz-



**Kingsport Breaks Ground on Higher Education Center**  
Continues its Quest for Academic Village in Downtown

BY RACHEL A. HORTON

The most difficult problem facing the region's largest employers today is the lack of a skilled workforce and the fact that much of the current workforce is approaching retirement. Eastman Chemical Company officials announced last month the retirement of two executives and several resulting senior management appointments. The 2006 Greater Kingsport Area Chamber of Commerce business survey found 9,100 jobs are to be filled over the next 10 years — 1,600 will require a college degree or higher and another 2,500 will require an advanced degree.

"The last period of significant growth in business and industry in the Kingsport area was in the 60s and '70s and a lot of the employees that came on board back then now have 35 to 45 years of experience and they're approaching retirement," says Charlie Floyd, vice president and mill manager, Dorrain, Kingsport. "We're seeing a big turnover on our horizon that really has already begun that is going to continue over the next five to 10 years."

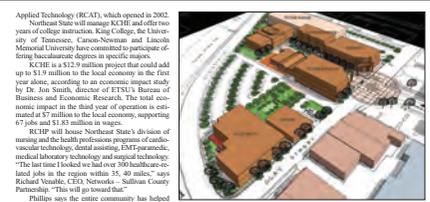
Those were the concerns heard by former Kingsport Mayor Jeanette Blazier in 1999, when she hosted an economic summit to discuss with other government officials and educators the future of the workforce in Kingsport and Sullivan County. Blazier said at the July 7, 2009, groundbreaking for the Kingsport Center for Higher Education (KCHE), the "champions" Northeast State Technical Community College President Dr. William Locke and Keith Wilson, publisher, Kingsport Times-News to spearhead what is now called the Kingsport Academic Village.

"We set that economic summit for Northeast State with two major goals — to try to get Educate & Grow (Northeast program for local students that pays for the first two years at the school) and to try to get a building downtown," Locke says.

Wilson and Locke, along with the Kingsport Board of Mayor & Aldermen (BMA) and surrounding government officials have kept the momentum going since Blazier left office and in a little more than a year from now, Kingsport will have more than 2,100 students attending classes downtown.

"What we are trying to do is get the education level up in Kingsport and Sullivan County by making higher education so convenient and cost-effective that anyone could get an education," says Kingsport Mayor Dennis Phillips.

The village includes KCHE; the Regional Center for Health Professions (RCHP), slated to open August 2008; the Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM), which will start construction August 31, 2008; and the Regional Center for



Architect's rendering of the Higher Education Center complex in downtown Kingsport

Applied Technology (RCAT), which opened in 2002. Northeast State will manage KCHE and offer two years of college instruction. King College, the University of Tennessee, Carson-Newman and Lincoln Memorial University have committed to participating in baccalaureate degrees in specific majors.

KCHE is a \$12.5 million project that could add up to \$1.9 million to the local economy in the first year alone, according to an economic impact study by Dr. Jon Smith, director of ETSU's Bureau of Business and Economic Research. The "total economic impact in the third year of operation is estimated at \$9 million to the local economy, supporting 67 jobs and \$1.43 million in wages.

RCHP will have Northeast State's divisions of nursing and the health professions programs of cardiovascular technology, dental assisting, EMF/paramedic, medical laboratory technology and surgical technology.

"Double up the benefit on the investment and encouragement from Phillips, City Manager John Campbell and the BMA, and most importantly, the need. It wouldn't have happened without the need. Sullivan County has a lot to honor with this one."

Phillips says the entire community has helped along with the BMA, especially small business owners in downtown Kingsport. "The amazing heroes in the whole thing are the people that have been instrumental during the construction process and the people that have been asked to relocate. We've had to relocate numerous businesses to make this successful. They could have really fought us and drag this out forever."

"Double up the benefit on the investment and encouragement from Phillips, City Manager John Campbell and the BMA, and most importantly, the need. It wouldn't have happened without the need. Sullivan County has a lot to honor with this one."

Locke says community colleges across the country are in position to provide training to the American workforce, but "There are very few that have stepped into the level that we have. You won't see anywhere where you get a community building four buildings."

Northeast State still craves gain-recognition for their commitment to Kingsport's Academic Village, a move Locke hopes to secure funding in the future. "As the long run, we hope that our confidence will continue to grow and increase which will help us with our funding."

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**Opposite: Kingsport's second generation of "founding fathers." Above: The Business Journal of Tri-Cities, TN/VA's coverage of the Higher Education Center's groundbreaking.**

looked out at a community that had lost its way. It was the blunting of the Kingsport spirit.

Kingsport Tomorrow, with Jeanette Blazier as its first exec-

ing came with a slow erosion of Kingsport's retail dominance. Dollars that used to be spent in Kingsport were going to Johnson City. The Kingsport metro area's share of retail sales tax collections declined.

Those were trying times for many in Kingsport. Businesspeople, city officials and many residents were frustrated and angry at what was happening to their town. But more than that, many were afraid of what they were seeing. Local leaders

SEE MODEL CITY, 26

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**MODEL CITY, CONTINUED**

utive director, was formed to combat that. “We called them ‘the times of no,’” she said. “No against that, and no to this. We needed help re-energizing the Kingsport spirit.” She used all her skills as an organizer and consensus builder to mold Kingsport Tomorrow into a cohesive, forward-looking organization with an action plan. The result was Vision 2017, and many of the outcomes were positive. Blazier moved from Kingsport Tomorrow to the mayor’s seat on the Kingsport Board of Mayor and Alderman in 1999.

Blazier says she was elected mayor, but “the election didn’t give me a city manager.” That laced many of the tasks to come with political discord and made them more difficult to keep on track. “Our largest employer had also decided it was time to downsize.”

Mayor Blazier fell back on her skills as a consensus builder and retreated for two days with the BMA for a planning summit “to try and articulate why we were losing so many manufacturing jobs.” There also needed to be a strategy to cope with the city’s structural underemployment problem.

The number of goods-producing workers in the four-county Kingsport-Bristol Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) declined by 43.4% between 1990 and 2017. There were fewer nonfarm jobs and

more low-paying, part-time jobs without benefits. It was a dramatic change from two decades earlier when jobs were plentiful, and retailers rejoiced to the sound of ringing cash registers when the Eastman bonuses were delivered.

From that summit, the Downtown Academic Village concept would rise. Then-*Kingsport Times-News* Publisher Keith Wilson and Northeast State Community College President Dr. Bill Locke became what Blazier calls the “dynamic duo” of that effort.

Locke and Wilson, both of whom are now retired, had huddled before joining the committee about what seemed at that time to be separate concerns. Locke was new in his job at Northeast State and was looking for partners in the community to strengthen and grow the college. Wilson was concerned about the direction of the town and the local economy. From those early meetings, they formed a relationship forged on a path of mutual benefit.

Both men realized young people had become Kingsport’s biggest export. If young people were college bound, they had to move. Those who opted to remain often lacked the skills employers needed to cope with a workplace that was rapidly changing with new technologies.

**SEE MODEL CITY, 28**

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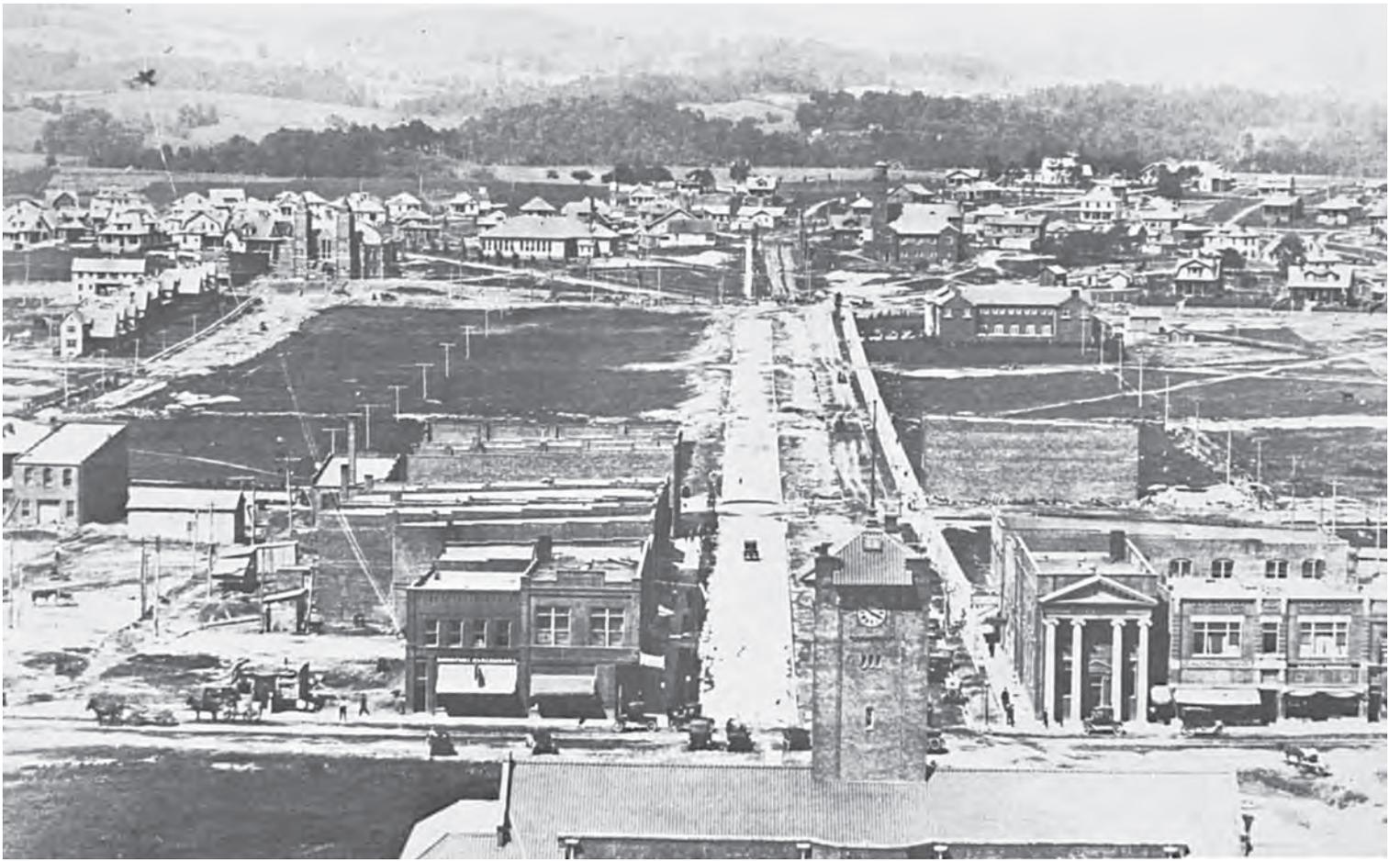


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The view of downtown from Cement Hill toward Church Circle: above, circa 1920; below, circa 1967.





A drone's-eye view of downtown from above Cement Hill circa 2017.

## MODEL CITY, CONTINUED

Locke and Wilson say it was abundantly clear from their conversations about education and where the economy was going that “a high school diploma was no longer a terminal degree. If you aspired beyond fast-food employment you’re required to have some post-secondary education,” Wilson said.

Wilson wondered what would it cost to fund students on a K-14 path. Locke crunched the numbers based on the paths local graduates were taking and came back with a cost of \$25,000 per student. “It was about that time that Jennette was elected and she was putting together a visioning process, so I went to Jeannette,” Wilson said. His idea was that the city would pay for city high school graduates who wanted an associates’ degree if a downtown campus was established. She asked that he and Locke bring the idea to the BMA planning session she had scheduled.

Wilson’s and Locke’s idea was, “if an education in the 21st century in the U.S. isn’t complete with a high school diploma, the bar should be raised to an associate degree or technical degree.” It served the city’s advantage to underwrite what would result in a better-trained local labor force and a larger population of young people, they said.

After that was approved word got out. Kingsport got a lot of attention from cities around the state. The Associated Press also picked it up, and the story went out on the A wire. There were more inquires – even one from Vietnam.

That evolved into Kingsport looking at ways to become a smart

city and repositioning its economic activities around having an educated workforce. It became a fundamental building block in how the city would market itself. Wilson was tabbed as the chairman of a committee charged with fleshing out that idea. One of the things the committee looked at was having a bigger presence in downtown Kingsport. That dovetailed with efforts to revitalize the downtown sector that had been deserted by retail and was in a state of decay.

At that time, Johnson City, Tenn.-based East Tennessee State University had a Kingsport campus at Allendale. It was basically out-of-sight, out-of-mind. Students – 400-to-500 at that time - could take some classes, but there wasn’t a defined degree track. Wilson and then-Mayor Dennis Phillips saw that as a piece to the puzzle for a higher downtown education presence. Their proposal was simple enough on the surface. If ETSU would give Kingsport the Allendale campus at the same price (\$1) that Kingsport had given it to the university the city would build a higher education center downtown. That would have moved access to a two-year downtown education to a four-year institution, and ETSU would be a partner. ETSU passed on the option. But King College did like it as did some others – including the University of Tennessee.

Shortly after that, another piece of the puzzle was completed when Locke had the opportunity to partner with Allied Health, and Kingsport agreed to furnish the downtown building. It was another instance of mutual benefit. Locke got to expand Northeast State’s offerings, and Kingsport got more young people downtown. That

SEE MODEL CITY, 28

## MODEL CITY, CONTINUED

was a lynchpin of sorts for the downtown revitalization.

Downtown retail wasn't on the table at the time without some sort of an incentive. But moving the focus to an education center in the downtown area with its large number of students was a revenue source for businesses that were sitting on the sidelines.

There's no denying that Kingsport has come a long way with its efforts to made education a central part of downtown redevelopment, or that all that work has paid off. "I'll be honest with you, I don't know how we did some of the things we did. Things just seemed to fall in place," Locke said recently.

According to City Manager Jeff Fleming some of the results that grew from those seeds planted 18 years ago, are: From 2000 to 2015 the population of Kingsport grew by 18.7 percent. The number of people with associate degrees increased by 64.3 percent. And the number of people with graduate degrees increased by 44.6 percent. During the same period, the number of Kingsport residents in the 20-to-24 year old age group increased 1.2 percent. "That's almost identical to the growth rate of that age group in Knoxville, the home of UT – the state's flagship university. It's also noteworthy that the median Kingsport family income grew 72.3 percent, Fleming said. While those numbers show some aggressive growth from yesterday's benchmarks, all of those closely involved think the Academic Village has a way to go before reaching its potential.

Phillips thinks the Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) can and should become the place where people from

all over the region come to learn a trade. "They can stay here and bring new people here. It's a given employers have the opportunity to pick the cream of the crop at RCAM. What I don't want to see done is for us to sit down, pat ourselves on the back, and say what a good job we did. We can't let up. Yesterday we did great. What are we going to do tomorrow?"

Phillips and Wilson sat on the Kingsport One committee that looked at the Academic Village's future. "It seemed to us that there's continued opportunity to expand the presence downtown as well as the education opportunity if we could become a model community for how you accomplish the Drive to 55," Wilson said.

Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam's Drive to 55 Challenge is based on some of the same things that were fundamental in the evolution of the Academic Village. The Drive to 55 Alliance has a goal to see 55 percent of Tennesseans attain a college degree or post-secondary certificate by 2025. The hope is to better equip the population to handle the demands new technologies will continue to place on the labor force.

As Kingsport moves toward its next quarter century, its clear the role and importance of the Academic Village will stimulate growth. The focus is now on the city-county efforts to prove they can demonstrate a model to achieve the Drive to 55 goal. It's an ambitious undertaking, but so was the Academic Village, which has demonstrated its worth despite being not quite 20 years old. Twenty years isn't much of a time span when a city is celebrating its centennial. But it's a good benchmark in an era when short-term goals moved to the forefront because – as Wilson often points out, "city successes should be measured in quarter centuries not quarters."



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# EASTMAN CHEMICAL COMPANY'S NEAR-CENTURY LONG JOURNEY

By Scott Robertson

Today, the chemical industry is the largest single economic driver in Kingsport, through the actions of Eastman Chemical Co., and the local companies with which it contracts. Yet few are aware that the chemical industry in Kingsport predates the 1920 founding of Tennessee Eastman.

During World War I, importation from Europe of many chemicals, including dye-stuffs, dropped

precipitously. At the same time, demand for high explosives rose. That combination opened a niche for new American chemical companies. The owners of the C.C.&O. Railway saw this as an opportunity for another industry to rise in Kingsport. Thus, in 1915, they founded the Federal Dyestuff and Chemical Corp., acquiring from the Holston Corp., 200 acres of land between the railroad and the Holston River.

Between 1915 and 1918 the Federal Dyestuffs plant appeared to be on the way to becoming the dominant industrial player in the city. However, when the War to End All Wars ended, demand dried up and the plant soon closed. It had, however, shown that Kingsport could function well as the site for a chemical company.

## BIRTH OF A CORPORATION

Federal Dyestuffs was not the only Kingsport industrial player to experience a crippling downturn when the war ended. American Wood Reduction had purchased land for a Kingsport wood distilling plant, and had begun construction of the facility before the post-war bust. When the company abandoned its Kingsport facility, the partially-built-out site caught the eye of agents of Rochester, N.Y.-based Eastman Kodak.

Eastman Kodak had been one of the companies that lost a significant portion of its raw materials supply chain during the war. The company's founder, George Eastman, instituted a post-war effort to find American sources for those raw materials, preferably sources that Eastman Kodak would be able to own and operate.

In Kingsport, Eastman Kodak found a site on which construction of a wood distilling plant had already begun, and which was



**George Eastman (left) and Perley Wilcox, the two men whose decisions led Eastman Kodak to Kingsport.**

surrounded by thousands of acres of woodland. The company sought the wood for its uses in the production of methanol and acetates. In 1920, Perley Wilcox, a longtime Eastman Chemical employee, negotiated the purchase of the site for a reported \$205,000. Wilcox would become the first director and general manager of the Tennessee Eastman Corp., which would later become Tennessee Eastman

Co., and operate as a subsidiary of Eastman Kodak for decades.

While methanol dominated Tennessee Eastman's early production, it was acetate products that would propel the company's growth. Cellulose esters production began in 1930 as Eastman Kodak adopted cellulose acetate in its film production. Soon after, Eastman Kodak began producing acetate yarn, then Tenite cellulose plastics, which rapidly broadened the company's customer base.

## THE EASTMAN-HATTAN PROJECT

During World War II, Eastman's involvement in the manufacture of Composition B RDX at the Holston Ordnance Works (see pages 38-40 for details) convinced the United States government the company could get things done. Thus, when the Manhattan Project was commissioned to create the first atomic bombs, Eastman was deemed the logical choice to operate the Y-12 facility at Oak Ridge, or as it would be known, the Clinton Engineer Works (in some circles the facility was referred to simply as "dogpatch," a reference to the setting of the popular hillbilly comic strip "Li'l Abner").

To understand the nature of Eastman's involvement, one must appreciate the sense of urgency in which atomic work was being conducted during World War II. The Manhattan Project got its name from the fact that its first head worked in that part of New York City. But when Dr. Vannevar Bush, chairman of the National Defense Research Committee (NDRC), concluded work wasn't happening quickly enough in Manhattan, the only tie between Manhattan and the Manhattan Project was severed.

Bush handed control of the project over to the U.S. Army



**The Tennessee Eastman Corporation, circa 1929. It would later become Tennessee Eastman Co., then Eastman Chemical Co.**

Corps of Engineers, which put General Leslie R. Groves in charge. Having studied engineering at M.I.T. and having graduated fourth in his class at West Point, Groves was both intellectually capable and possessed of the kind of drive needed to keep a complicated project moving.

On his first day in office, in September 1942, Groves purchased 1,250 tons of uranium and 52,000 acres of land along the Clinch River northwest of Knoxville, Tenn. Groves wanted things done quickly and done right. That mindset drove him to Eastman.

On Christmas Eve 1942, Groves called James C. White, who was Tennessee Eastman's general manager at the time. Groves had already hired DuPont and Union Carbide to operate other parts of the Oak Ridge facility, but wanted Eastman to run the electromagnetic plant. White initially declined, saying Eastman was already

stretched too thin, having only 6,500 employees with more than a third of those on military leave.

Tennessee Eastman President Perley Wilcox was then contacted. He concurred with White's assessment that the company could do no more. But Groves kept climbing the corporate ladder, and after he spoke with T.J. Hargrave, Kodak's chairman of the board, and Albert Chapman, Kodak's president, a meeting was arranged between Wilcox, White and Groves.

Groves assured Wilcox and White the job would only require around 1,500 people, not to exceed 2,500. Somewhat mollified, White and Wilcox signed on.

As it turned out, Groves had slightly underestimated the manpower requirement. By the end of the war, Y-12 would employ

**SEE EASTMAN, 34**

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## EASTMAN, CONTINUED

24,000+ people. That meant Eastman not only took on the largest engineering project in the history of the company, it also took on the largest training project. Because of the secretive nature of the work, employees had to be trained to handle very precise duties while having no idea how those duties fit in with anything else going on around them. After the war, Eastman employees would note the words “uranium” and “U235” were never spoken at Y-12, having been replaced with the term “tube alloy.”

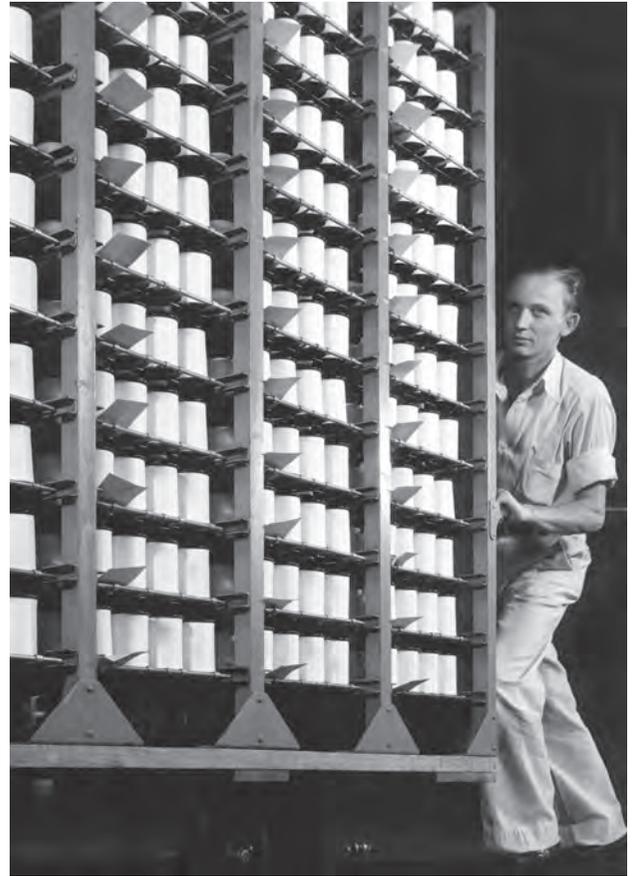
It was Y-12’s job to produce uranium tetrafluoride to be sent to Los Alamos, N.M., and synthesized into metal for creation of the atomic bomb. But only a handful of employees knew that. Some knew only that they had to turn the knobs to make sure the readings on their meters stayed within certain parameters. Some knew they were working to create uranium tetrafluoride, but they were not told why. The company managed the compartmentalized process to a successful conclusion.

Under Eastman’s management, Y-12 produced around 75 pounds of U235 for the war effort, including the material that went into the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. In addition, Composition B RDX from the Holston Ordnance Works was used in the production of the Nagasaki bomb, meaning Eastman would be involved in the war effort literally from America’s entry into the war until its end.

## GROWING PAINS AND CONTINUED GROWTH

The diversification of products in which Eastman Kodak chemicals were used had begun with the Tenite line in the 1930s. That diversification continued into the late 20th century, when chemicals from Kingsport were being used in the production of everything from apparel and home furnishings to automobile parts. The Kingsport operation had long since become an international player, selling more product to outside markets than it did to its parent company.

With the growth came pressure to perform on a worldwide stage,



In the middle 20th century, Eastman developed several acetate products, including yarn.

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something the company did not always handle well. Safety and environmental issues came to the fore. The starkest was the fatal explosion of Oct. 4, 1960 in which 16 lives were lost and more than 400 employees were injured. Environmental concerns, especially those concerning water quality in the Holston River, led the company in 1965 to commission the Academy of Natural Sciences at Drexel University to monitor the health of wildlife in the river. The Kingsport plant continues to this day to exceed mandated safety and ecological requirements.

By 1993, while the Tennessee operation was thriving, Kodak had a debt load of \$7 billion. As early as 1990, Kodak Chairman Kay Whitmore had considered spinning off Tennessee Eastman. After three years of consideration and discussion with Goldman Sachs advisors, Whitmore and Eastman Chemical Co.-CEO-to-be Earnie Deavenport confirmed it would happen.

The July 1993 *Business Journal of Upper East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia* headline read, "Goodbye Kodak, hello Wall Street." The newly formed Eastman Chemical Co., would, on Jan. 1, 1994, take its place as a newly minted Fortune 200 company. Deavenport said, "You provide kids with a healthy environment, a good education and the better things of life. But at some point they need to leave home and be on their own."

The "kid" Deavenport referred to was already achieving great things before the spin-off was official. In October, 1993 Deavenport received official word that Eastman had won the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

Today the Kingsport facility is one of the largest chemical

Aerial photograph of the Tennessee Eastman Co., plant on the banks of the Holston River circa 1967.

SEE EASTMAN, 36

A photograph of the Christ Fellowship church building, a large, modern structure with a prominent central entrance and large glass windows. The building is set on a green lawn with trees in the background. Overlaid on the image is the text "Christ FELLOWSHIP" in a stylized font. Below the image, a dark wood-grain background contains a celebratory message for Kingsport's 100th birthday, including a quote from Jeremiah 29:7 and contact information for the church.

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Eastman's new world headquarters building off Wilcox Drive.



Eastman Chemical Co.'s Kingsport plant as seen via GoogleEarth, 2016.

**EASTMAN, CONTINUED**

manufacturing sites in North America. In addition to a new world headquarters building, has more than 550 buildings over around 4,000 acres, with the main plant site covering around 900 acres.

Sales for the entire corporation in 2016 totaled \$2,188,000,000. The company today has more than \$900 million adjusted free cash flow, despite having reduced its total debt by

\$414 million and having returned \$417 million to shareholders through dividends and share repurchases in 2016.

Eastman is in the midst of a recommitment to Kingsport that began in May 2013 when then-CEO Jim Rogers announced "Project Inspire," a \$1.6 billion investment by the company in the Kingsport site to culminate in the company's own Kingsport Centennial in 2020. "Together we have built a significant legacy in this region," Rogers said. "We look forward to it continuing."

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# HOLSTON ORDNANCE WORKS:

## An unprecedented undertaking

By Scott Robertson

Tennessee Eastman Co. entered World War II about two weeks before the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. It was in mid-November, 1941 that Tennessee Eastman President Perley Wilcox took a call from Dr. Vannevar Bush, chairman of the National Defense Research Committee (NDRC). Bush asked Wilcox if Eastman would consider developing a process to recover anhydride from dilute acetic acid.

To understand the nature of that chemistry question, and how it would drive Kingsport to a position of prominence in America's national defense efforts for decades, one must look back even farther in time, to April 1935. It was then, just weeks after German Chancellor Adolph Hitler renounced the Treaty of Versailles, that Germany's first U-boat entered service.

The Germans spent the late 1930s developing a submarine fleet with hulls designed to survive the blasts of the TNT depth charges in use at the time. When the British Admiralty learned of the German efforts, it authorized work to create depth charges with stronger explosives.

The problem with the more powerful explosive compounds available at the time, however, was sensitivity to shock. It was no good building depth charges that would sink a U-boat, only to have them detonate in the back of a lorry on an English country road.

One of these substances, RDX (for Research Development Explosive), was, in its pure form at British laboratories, a white crystalline material considered too unstable for use. Researchers found, however, RDX could be mixed with TNT at a 3-to-2 ratio to bring the chance of accidental detonation within acceptable levels. That RDX-TNT mix was named Composition B. When aluminum powder was added to increase the force of undersea blasts, the British had their new depth charge explosive. The first RDX Composition B plant was built in 1938 at Woolrich Arsenal.

As the German U-boats began attacking convoys in 1939, Britain quickly discovered Woolrich lacked the capacity to meet demand. During the first seven months of 1939, 568 ships were lost in the Atlantic, mainly to U-boat attacks. The British did what they could to increase production, but by 1941, they came to America to ask for assistance.

Though America was not yet an official combatant in the war, the British back-channel request led to construction of a U.S.-based RDX plant using an identical procedure to that at Woolrich, the Wabash Ordnance Works near Terre Haute, Ind. The contract for DuPont to manufacture RDX Composition B at Wabash was signed immediately following Pearl Harbor. For the U.S., there was only one problem. Wabash's entire output was contractually obligated to go to the British.

Even before it OK'd the Wabash agreement, the U.S. realized it needed an RDX plant to serve its own needs.

So Perley Wilcox's telephone rang and Vannevar Bush asked his chemistry question.

At Woolrich and Wabash, it took 11 pounds of nitric acid to make one pound of RDX. Years later, Holston Ordnance Works Production Superintendent R.C. Burton would look back on those plants as, "nitric acid plant dogs with RDX plant tails."

Chemists at the Universities of Toronto and Michigan had been working on a new process that involved using acetic anhydride alongside the hexamine, nitric acid and ammonium nitrate that had already been part of the RDX recipe.

Tennessee Eastman was a leading producer of acetic anhydride, and Bush wanted to know if the scientists in Kingsport could take the next step in RDX production.

The new process reduced the amount of nitric acid needed by 85 percent and increased the ratio of RDX to hexamine 2-to-1. The problem was the build-up of a huge amount of acetic acid byproduct. That acid, Bush told Wilcox, needed to be reconverted to anhydride.

So two weeks before Pearl Harbor, Eastman received its first

CONSTRUCTION DATA (Compiled by Fraser-Brace)

CONTRACT AWARDED .....	June 1, 1942
START OF CONSTRUCTION .....	July 4, 1942
INITIAL OPERATION .....	April 20, 1943
FULL PRODUCTION - 100% CAPACITY .....	August, 1943
FULL PRODUCTION - 200% CAPACITY .....	January, 1944
CONTRACT COMPLETION DATE (FRASER-BRACE) .....	March 15, 1944
ACTUAL COMPLETION DATE .....	March 15, 1944
TOTAL GROSS COST .....	\$107,432,323
MAXIMUM PEAK EMPLOYMENT .....	18,000
TOTAL MANHOURS .....	38,655,315
PLANT ACREAGE .....	6,545
PERMANENT BUILDINGS ERECTED .....	242
MAGAZINES ERECTED .....	141
TIMBER AND EARTH BARRICADES, ERECTED .....	210
RAILROAD CARS UNLOADED .....	19,827
ELECTRICAL CAPACITY .....	32,000 KVA
TRANSMISSION LINES .....	6.7 miles
TRANSFORMERS .....	54,559 KVA
DISTRIBUTION TRANSFORMER STATIONS .....	209
DISTRIBUTION, LIGHTING AND UNDERGROUND LINES .....	104 miles
TELEPHONE STATIONS .....	516
FIRE REPORTING STATIONS .....	120
OUTSIDE STEAM AND PROCESS LINES .....	131 miles
STEAM CAPACITY .....	1,980,000 lb/hr
WATER CAPACITY .....	447 million gal/day
WATER INTAKE CANAL .....	2,200 lineal ft.
CHANNELS AND CHANNEL CHANGES .....	5,700 lineal ft.
PIPE TUNNELS .....	1,246 lineal ft.
INTAKE TUNNELS UNDER RIVER .....	1,000 lineal ft.
WATER LINES .....	74.73 miles
SEWER LINES .....	36.85 miles
RAILROAD TRACKAGE .....	30.55 miles
RAILROAD BRIDGES: TIMBER SPANS, CONCRETE PIERS .....	8
HIGHWAY BRIDGES: TIMBER SPANS, CONCRETE PIERS .....	16
STEEL RAILROAD AND HIGHWAY BRIDGES .....	2,105 lineal ft.
TRESTLES ON PILES & BENTS, CONCRETE FOOTINGS .....	4,310 lineal ft.
ROADS .....	59 miles
PARKING LOTS .....	153,465 square yds.
FENCES .....	38 miles
ROCK EXCAVATION .....	581,244 cubic yds.
EARTH EXCAVATION .....	6,190,276 cubic yds.
BACKFILL .....	1,081,917 cubic yds.
ROCKFILL - WATER DIVERSION .....	13,280 tons
CRUSHED ROCK .....	1,200,000 tons
CONCRETE .....	241,191 cubic yds.
FORMS .....	6,048,204 square ft.
LUMBER .....	45,094,000 board ft.
REINFORCING BAR AND WIRE MESH .....	35,900,000 lbs.
BRICK .....	8,877 million
CINDER BLOCK AND TILE .....	603.5 million
OUTSIDE TANKS INSTALLED ON TANK FARMS .....	700
FLOOR AREA OF BUILDINGS .....	2,557,673 square ft.
CUBAGE OF BUILDINGS .....	42,115,886 cubic ft.

**Tale of the tape: construction of Holston Ordnance Works by the numbers.**



A 1940s vintage photo of Holston Ordnance Works.

first shipment of weak acid from Canada. By Jan. 16, the company received authorization to build a small pilot plant. Having anticipated that authorization, Eastman had already finished construction of the plant's first unit, and had begun 24-hour production shifts three days before receiving it.

The company continued working at a breakneck pace to build a production plant at Wexler Bend capable of making and processing one half-ton of RDX daily. Meanwhile, on Feb. 6, another chemistry question came down the line from the NDRC. "Could the plant make Composition B?" That was the first time Eastman executives had been made aware there was no safe way to ship large quantities of

RDX unless it were cut with TNT. Wilcox was vexed, but agreed to build the Composition B plant if it could be constructed some distance away from the Tennessee Eastman plant.

A site that had been part of the company's logging rail operations at the base of Bays Mountain was chosen, and a system designed to move explosives from building to building in slurry form via centrifugal pumps was devised. By March, the Composition B plant was up and running.

Impressed by the company's work rate, the United States Army instructed Eastman to double capacity and, "make all you can."

SEE HOLSTON, 40



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**BAE Systems now operates the Holston Army Ammunition Plant for the United States Army**

indicating it was ready to build a large commercial installation. On June 6, the Army agreed and Eastman received a letter of intent to design and operate Holston Ordnance Works. Around 20,000 workers contributed to the construction, significantly increasing Kingsport's population and creating a temporary housing crisis in the process. Production began April 29, 1943.

It bears noting that Tennessee Eastman was asked to produce just short of a billion pounds of a tremendously potent explosive using a staff that had no experience with explosives. Tennessee Eastman was part of Eastman Kodak, a camera film company.

It had not been part of what would later come to be called the military-industrial complex.

Taking that fact into account, the safety record for the facility is remarkable. During World War II, Holston employed more than 6,000 workers in operations. Only three died, and none of the deaths was explosives-related.

Today, the Holston Army Ammunition Plant is comprised of more than 6,000 acres in two counties, with more than 450 buildings, 100 miles of roads and 30 miles of rail. It continues to employ more than 450 individuals.

The plant is operated by BAE Systems and remains the major supplier of explosive materials to the United States Department of Defense. Though the plant continues to produce RDX-based products, it now produces IMX 101, the first in a line of munitions designed to be more stable than Composition B. The Kingsport site continues to work to make weapons that are more deadly to our enemies, while being safer for our servicemen and women to transport, handle and use.

*Much of the information above came from the account of R.C. Burton, general superintendent of production at Holston Ordnance Works during World War II, vice president of Eastman Kodak Co., and assistant general manager of the Eastman Chemicals Division. Burton spoke of his experience at the Ordnance Works and of the origins of what is now the Holston Army Ammunition Plant at a meeting of the Rotary Club of Kingsport, Tenn., on Sept. 10, 1975. The Business Journal wishes to acknowledge the Rotary Club, Holston Army Ammunition Plant and the Archives of Appalachia for use of the materials from which this article was researched.*

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## 100 YEARS

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Clinchfield Rail Station, 1951. Courtesy of the Archives of the City of Kingsport. Thomas McNeer Jr. Photograph Collection. KCMC 106

**National Register of Historic Places:** The old Clinchfield Railroad Station has a storied past and is today home of Citizens Bank's downtown Kingsport office.

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# KINGSPORT TO HAVE NEW PLANT AT COST OF MILLION DOLLARS

Will Turn Out Finished Paper From Pulp Of Meade Fibre Company—May Be In Operation In 6 Months

*Bristol Company*  
Kingsport, Tenn., Aug. 25.—That work will begin next week on the construction of a finished-paper mill, expected to cost approximately a million dollars, was information given out here yesterday by J. H. Thickens, general manager of the Meade Company, one of the largest of the group of industrial plants in the city. The new plant, which will be a part of the Meade Fibre Company, will have a capacity of 35 tons of finished paper a day and will employ about 100 men and women, raising the total number of employes of the company to the neighborhood of 350. The capacity of the pulp making plant now in operation will be increased from 70 to 85 tons a day when the finishing plant is completed.

The grade of paper to be manufactured by the new mill, Mr. Thickens said, will be that used in books and higher class magazines. Half of the big production of the finished plant, according to Mr. Thickens, has already been disposed of, but no announcement has been made as to the company which has contracted for this output.

The buildings to be erected, three in number, will be constructed exclusively of brick, concrete, and steel. Plans contemplate the completion of the construction work in three months, and the installation of machinery within the following quarter, putting the plant ready for operation within six months. The new buildings will be located in the immediate vicinity of the plant now in operation.



Domtar Plant Manager Bill MacPherson with a wood copy of the city proclamation issued by Mayor John Clark (right) commemorating the Kingsport paper plant's 100 years of operation in 2016.

## DOMTAR'S KINGSPORT OPERATION WELCOMES CITY TO CENTURY CLUB

By Lynn J. Richardson

Domtar, the owner of Kingsport's paper mill, got a one-year Centennial head start on the rest of the city, celebrating 100 years of the Kingsport mill's operation in 2016. The company's year-long celebration included the donation of 100 trees to the city as well as the funding of a new scholarship in the company's name.

"Kingsport has been a wonderful place for our operation to grow," Plant Manager Bill MacPherson said. That growth has created a major annual economic impact on both the City of Kingsport and the region as a whole. The company is responsible for an estimated regional economic impact of \$190 million per year. The mill employs around 400 workers, and, with an additional 750 indirect jobs in the area created by the Ridgefields converting facility, more than 1,100 workers benefit from Domtar's presence in Kingsport.

In addition, the company is investing in training the local workforce to handle the needs of advanced manufacturing. "We have an incredible partnership with Northeast State's Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) which allows us to recruit well-rounded manufacturing students who are willing to work hard to get a head start in the industry."

"The RCAM facility has become almost like an extension of the mill," he added. "Through Domtar's apprenticeship program with the RCAM facility, we are able to pair classroom lessons and lab simulation activities with on-the-job training executed by journeymen at our mill who have decades

of experience. Coupling the mill's training with earned credits at Northeast State allows us to build well-rounded manufacturers who not only come out very skilled in their field but also have the abilities to think critically, creatively and competitively for the future of our company."

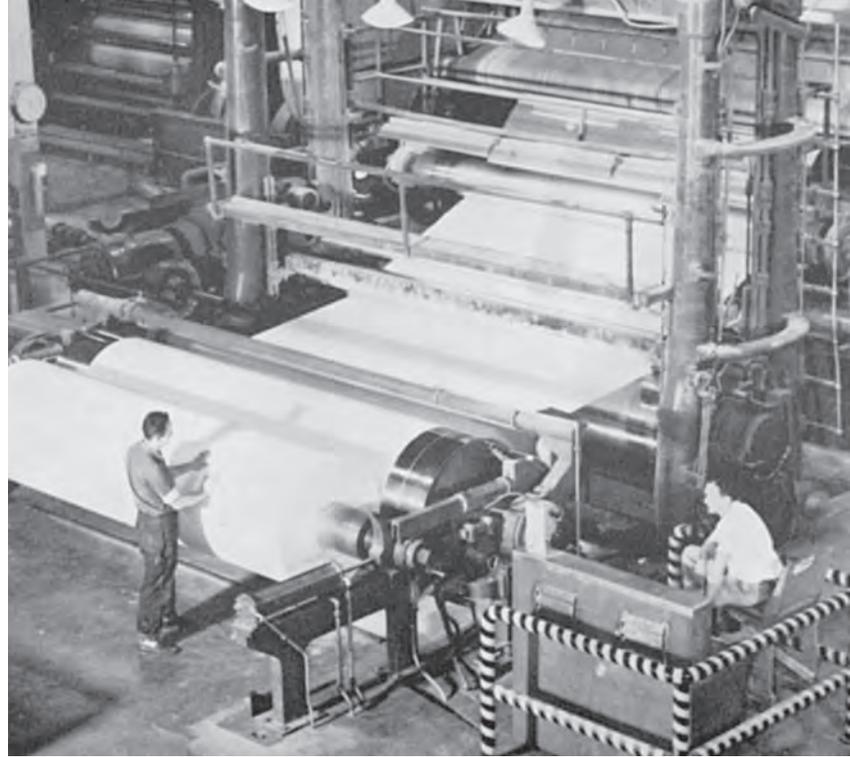
Domtar will continue to support the growth of the 21st century manufacturer, he says, noting that late last year, the Kingsport Mill donated a portion of its plant property to aid in the 15,000 square-foot expansion of the RCAM training facility. Just as the labor pool for manufacturing is reinventing itself, so too is Domtar.

The first mill in Kingsport was only a pulp mill, opening in 1916 under the auspices of the Kingsport Pulp Co.

Mead Paper Co., was a partner in that operation, using the pulp to supply other paper mills around the country. By 1923, Mead bought out its partners and opened its own paper mill on the site.

Willamette purchased the mill in 1995. Weyerhaeuser acquired it from Willamette in 2002, and it became part of Domtar in 2007. The company says the mill currently produces 426,000 short tons annually with annual pulp production capacity of 304,000 tonnes of pulp. The mill's major product is uncoated printer paper.

"Kingsport is one of the last two or three thoroughbred paper machines with the technology and cost efficiencies to be a long-term survivor in the paper market," MacPherson said. "We have the newest, most advanced paper machine in North America, and our machine and expert manufacturers ensure that the demand for



An early 1960s vintage photograph of workers at the Mead Paper Co., checking the quality of the product.

paper is met.

"What we do here is amazing," MacPherson said. "We make

SEE PAPER, 44

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## PAPER, CONTINUED

high-quality communication and specialty paper - producing 4,200 feet of paper per minute. At this rate, the Kingsport Mill has the capability to produce enough paper to cover two lanes of highway from Kingsport, Tenn., to Montreal, Canada.”

The local mill takes pride in its efficient paper making process, MacPherson said. “From wood chip, to paper, to the shelves of our local supplies stores, our employees can complete the paper-making process in a matter of five days or less.”

“Our paper is used for everyday copy printing,” he added. “Whether you’re printing a report at work, helping your child complete a worksheet assignment from school, or drawing up plans for your next great invention; you could be using Domtar paper.”

While the Kingsport plant continues to concentrate on xerographic paper production, it is also involved in research and development on other potential products to be gleaned from wood pulp. The company is involved in using lignin, a biodegradable bonding agent in wood, to create environmentally friendly trash bags, and “fluff pulp,” which is just what it sounds like, as filler for diapers. As the nation and world edge closer to the a “paperless society,” company-wide diversification should allow the Kingsport plant to remain insulated from the decline in overall demand for paper.

“Remaining relevant for the long term requires growth,” MacPherson said. “For the Kingsport mill, growth will require innovation and re-invention to generate new jobs. We believe that bio-materials and other sources of revenue will be important to remaining viable for many years.”



At the Domtar mill in 2016, workers monitor the quality of the product from a central control room.

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# General Shale

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# PAL'S SUDDEN SERVICE:

Small order manufacturing at a nationally elite level

By Lynn J. Richardson

Much has been written about Pal Barger, founder and owner of Pal's Sudden Service, and how he was inspired, in the early 1950s by a Texas fast food restaurant, to develop a one-of-a-kind drive-thru burger restaurant in his native Kingsport.

It is a story of innovation, hard work and success. But the best part of that story is Barger's willingness to share it with others, says Pal's President and CEO, Thom Crosby.

In addition to running their successful business, Barger and Crosby established the Pal's Business Excellence Institute, a non-profit entity that trains those striving for excellence in their own companies. Participants learn the principles used daily in Pal's operations - principles that have led to success and boosted by the pursuit of a national award.

Barger and Crosby have been working together for a long time - 36 years. During that time, both have learned and developed principles that earned Pal's the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 2001.

Pal's was the first restaurant company ever to earn the honor, and Crosby was quick to point out that Kingsport is also the smallest town in America ever to have two winners; Eastman Chemical also received the award - in 1993.

The company places a high value on customers and customer service. So it is not inappropriate that Barger and Crosby's decision to go after the Baldrige award was the direct result of a customer's unrelenting insistence that they do so.

"We had a customer who was very persistent with us - Michael Lewis - who worked for Holston Defense which was, at that time, managed by Eastman Chemical," Crosby said. "He kept telling us about the Baldrige award and how its principles worked at Eastman. He would be virtually telling us this across the counter, talking about performance excellence and Eastman's involvement with it, insisting this might be the icing on the cake for us.

"Finally, after about three or four years, Pal and I decided to take the material he had given us, go to our separate corners, study it independently, and come back and talk about it," Crosby said. "We could both see what a wonderful way this would be to assess our business and we could see where we could make significant gains to improve."

With both agreeing to head down that path, their next decision would be on the approach they would take. "We had two possible ways to get started on this," Crosby said. "One - let's go out and hire a bunch of consultants who understand this and let them help us through this, or two - let's learn to become experts ourselves and then help others."

"On the second Tuesday of July 1994, we brought all of our management together and told them this not only would help us improve, but we believed we could use it as a framework to structure our business on," Crosby said. "The process was really like looking in a mirror; finding out where the blemishes are on me, does my hair look ok? We learned a whole lot."

Although the Baldrige Award focused heavily on manufacturing, it resounded with Barger and Crosby like nothing ever had before. "Going through the criteria, we realized we aren't in the restaurant business," Crosby said. "We are a manufacturing business. They create an

F150 pick up truck; we manufacture and create the Big Pal, French Fries and Big Tea."

"The world opened up to us on how we could improve," Crosby continued. "We went from flying a kite to a jet plane to a rocket. "Of all quick service hamburger restaurants McDonalds and In-n-Out Burger do more sales per store than we do," Crosby said. "But we're third in the nation. If you break it down to sales per square foot, nobody even touches us. We are almost double our next competitor."

The driver of this success is the "assess and improve" mindset driven by the Baldrige criteria, Crosby said. "If everybody would reach out and learn about this, it would be wonderful," he added.

The Pal's Business Excellent Institute is the result of taking action to address that "if only" statement. BEI President and co-founder, David McClaskey, said the BEI is all about offering others a chance to learn how to make their companies truly excellent. Excellence is achieved, McClaskey said, by learning how to get an edge in one's field and then learning how to beat the competition year after year. And the principles used in making Pal's a success can be applied to almost any business - not just restaurants.



The drivers behind the drive-thru: Pal Barger (left) and Thom Crosby.

“Thom and I founded BEI in 2000,” McClaskey said. “I’d lived in the Kingsport area for 45 years and worked at Eastman for 34 years, and I kept hearing that Pal’s was a well-managed company. “Everybody knew about their hamburgers,” he added. “But I kept hearing ‘well-managed.’ Then I heard Thom at a local conference and I said ‘Wow! They’re right.’ Pal’s is one of the best managed companies of any type in the country.”

McClaskey wanted to be involved and Crosby was more than willing. “He said ‘Yes, you can learn more and then share it with others,’” McClaskey recalls. “Because Thom and Pal are willing to share that - except with direct competitors - we can help anyone who is interested.”

“The key is the leadership,” McClaskey says. “The BEI is for companies and people who want to be extraordinary rather than ordinary. I help leaders who want to be extraordinary.”

Each year the BEI has 700-800 participants. They come from government, education, health care and more. They come from as far away as Canada and Australia.

“Our Institute is often attended by people who haven’t even started their own store,” McClaskey explained. “When people come, if they do this before they open their first store, they are more successful.

“Nobody teaches you how to run a business,” he added. “But those who haven’t had help make all kinds of mistakes and can severely compromise their business.”

The key to success is to never give up on excellence, McClaskey says. “We are asked how do we hire. How do we train? How do we get everybody’s order right? People are able to learn the lessons



A photo used in company ads shows cars with a motion blur to insinuate quick service.

SEE PAL'S, 48

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## PAL'S, CONTINUED

Thom and Pal have developed. It's doable. People just have to stop compromising.

"Fortunately we're with a group that refuses to look at the average," he said. "Instead, they look up to the most excellent. "People who just want to settle? We can't help them. But through BEI, we get to talk to only those leaders who don't want to go that direction, and we have a remedy for people who don't just want to settle.

"They come because they want to learn to be excellent," McClaskey said. "Pal's has done a great job. You never see an organization managed at this level."

As for the restaurant chain/manufacturing operation, 29 locations later, Pal's is still growing. Though the company is known for its "sudden service," its growth continues to be slow and deliberate.

"We fill one media market at a time," Crosby explained. "It's more effective to grow from one media market, and fill that out. That maximizes our brand impact in that market. Then we grow into the next contiguous media market."

Crosby doesn't decide how many restaurants the company wants; instead they focus on the people who will run each location. "Our main focus is on creating leaders that are so capable that we can't not build a store for them," he said. "We say, 'Wow, we have a superstar! We need to build a store for this person.'

Currently, Crosby says, Pal's has eight leaders in development.



Secretary of Commerce Donald Evans, Pal Barger, Thom Crosby and President George W. Bush at the presentation of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

"We do it backwards," he added. "We develop the leader first. Property is always available, so we just grow at a slow logical rate that maximizes our impact.

"Pal's' goal isn't to have the most restaurants on the ground, but to make certain that each one is very very successful. We know, with the right leaders, that will always be the case."

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(Below) The *Tazewell, Va. Republican's* July 28, 1910 report on construction of what would become the Penn-Dixie Portland Cement plant (above).

**Kingsport Taking on Metropolitan Airs.**

Kingsport, Tenn., July 25.—Several hundred men are employed constructing the plant of the Clinchfield Portland Cement Company in east Kingsport. The structure will be concrete and steel and will cost a million dollars when ready for operation January 1, 1911.

Several contractors from the north have arrived here and are pushing their contracts on this industry to completion. The C., C. & O. railway is daily transporting machinery and material to Kingsport, which town is the boom center of this region.

The first issue of the *Kingsport Sentinel*, a weekly newspaper, has appeared. The Howard Manufacturing Company has purchased a printing press and will issue the paper regularly. It will be democratic and will be edited by J. W. T. Peltier, a local lawyer.

Several hundred Sunday school workers from Johnson City were enjoying their annual picnic in Kingsport on last Thursday.

Several gasoline and steam launches have been placed in service on the Holston river. One of these pleasure launches is owned by George Gildersleeve, of Johnson City.

The C., C. & O. railway is receiving some new passenger locomotives, which are the finest ever seen in this part of the South.

The passenger trains of the C., C. & O. railway stop at Rotherwood to accommodate the people of Hawkins county.

The new brick plant is rapidly nearing completion. When finished it will be one of the largest in this entire section and will give employment to a number of men.

Kingsport will undoubtedly be the industrial metropolis of East Tennessee. Cheap fuel, abundance of water power, an ideal location in the most fertile valley of the section combine to make it the best point possible for a large manufacturing plant.

# SUMMERS TAYLOR STILL BUILDING FROM THE BASE OF CEMENT HILL

By Don Fenley

The Penn-Dixie Portland Cement Plant was the first industry to make Kingsport its home. The rise behind the train station at the foot of Broad Street is still known as Cement Hill. But the construction industry is not the same as it once was. Penn-Dixie is long gone, and the shield you see on the building at the base of Cement Hill today is that of Summers Taylor.

Anytime you slow down for road or bridge construction in the Kingsport area odds are it's a Summers Taylor crew you're about to pass. The company is a heavyweight in the Tri-Cities construction trades and beyond. And you'll find it doing a lot of site development and construction jobs for Eastman, BAE and any other industrial clients.

Founded in 1932, Summers Taylor received the the 69th maintenance and construction contractor license in the state of Tennessee. At that time, its focus was with two large rayon mills. The firm broadened its scope and began picking up contracts to build local schools, hospitals, and retail stores during World War II when the German-owned rayon mills were nationalized. From those beginnings, Summers Taylor became firmly entrenched as a leading construction firm not only in the Kingsport area but the tri-state region of northeast Tennessee, southwest Virginia and western North Carolina.

Company President Grant Summers is the fourth generation of family ownership. He is hoping for good things from Governor Bill Haslam's and President Donald Trump's infrastructure plans. Tennessee has built up a substantial backlog of road and bridge work. "I think we rank fifth in the nation for states that have gone the longest without new funding for roads," he said. "There's a huge need, and we think this is a great time for it and appreciate the governor's leadership. Roads shouldn't be a partisan issue, and on the state level Tennesseans need to take care of Tennessee problems."

A total of 199 Northeast Tennessee road and bridge projects with an estimated cost of \$2.1 billion from the governor's list are on Summers' watch list – 105 of those projects are in the Tri-Cities area. If approved, the governor's plan would have a major impact on the quality of area bridges and roads while giving local economies a shot in the arm.

The Tri-Cities area saw 188 construction firms close during the Great Recession.

SEE CEMENT HILL, 50

## CEMENT HILL, CONTINUED

“Those are jobs we need in this area,” Summers said. “We can’t have everyone working in a service-based economy. If they put out the work, there is certainly an over capacity in the construction sector. We lost jobs, but the organizational and equipment capacity is ready, and we can put people back to work. The construction industry can respond very quickly.”

While the disruptive forces of technology have taken a big jobs toll on many industries, construction hasn’t been hit as hard, Summers said. Yes, you can automate a lot of functions in a big manufacturing plant, “but you can’t automate a shovel at the bottom of a ditch.” Still, technology is a growing influence in the construction trades. “It’s a huge part of what we do and when we get involved in GPS grade control it really increases productivity. But it doesn’t decrease the manpower as much as it does in other trades.

“Construction is still people intensive, and we have to have good people.” That’s why Summers and his firm support training efforts from organizations like the Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing in Kingsport’s Academic Village. He thinks it’s a good sign that civic leaders and the wider population have realized not every high school graduate is going to a four-year college. Some will go to trade school, or get a certificate then go straight into construction where they can start at a good paying job. “The sooner they start, the sooner than can work up.” And, “there’s no student debt bubble in construction. Our upper-class operators, foremen and project managers have very good paying jobs.”

“We’re bullish,” Summers said. “We’re expanding.”



Grant Summers, the fourth generation of his family to run the company.

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# A CENTURY OF SERVICE

Locally-owned companies that have operated for more than 100 years

By Scott Robertson

When, on March 2, 1917, Governor Tom C. Rye signed final approval to the charter that incorporated the City of Kingsport, three businesses that have remained locally owned throughout their history were already conducting commerce. They did not go by the names by which we now know them at that time, but the firms that would become Armstrong Construction, Hamlett-Dobson Funeral Home and Crematory and the law firm of Hunter, Smith and Davis were all active in 1916 or before.

## ARMSTRONG CONSTRUCTION

Today, you'll see Armstrong Construction crews working to build Centennial Park in front of the old train station downtown. That's not too far from where the company was founded in 1915 as Armstrong Purkey.

"We started out building residential in Fairacres," says Leland Leonard, who served as the company's president from 1977-2011. "Then we ventured into commercial. We built retail. We built the Charles Store that is now an antiques store. We built Sobel's Men's Store. We built a lot of banks and churches around town. The first Sears department store that was built here in town was out on the property where the golf course was in front of Johnson Elementary. And we built Johnson Elementary as well."

Eventually the company found its niche building schools. "We were especially noted for school building up in southwest Virginia – Wise, Russell and Lee counties. We did work in Harlan, Ky. We built a high school up there. We built Dobyns-Bennett High School – the old high school, and added the addition onto it that made it a middle school. We built Lincoln Elementary School and added onto that. We built Jackson Elementary School."

Armstrong Construction, as it came to be known in 1939, now employs around 40. In addition to its retail, residential and school work, the company has also built defense-related institutional



**Leland Leonard (left) was president of Armstrong Construction from 1977-2011. John W. Leonard II is the current president of the company.**

buildings, including work at Nuclear Fuel Services in Erwin, Tenn., and the National Guard armories in both Johnson City and Kingsport. Leland Leonard's son, John W. Leonard II is the

SEE CENTURY, 54

A vibrant advertisement for the City of Kingsport's Centennial celebration. The background is a collage of park activities: a skateboarder on a ramp, two white ducks, children on a playground, a soccer game, and people at a water fountain. A large rainbow arches over the scene. Text in the center reads "City of Kingsport Centennial 1917 - 2017 Parks and Recreation on the Move". At the bottom, it says "Kingsport Parks and Recreation Department 423-229-9457 KingsportParksandRecreation.org". A small sign in the foreground says "ENJOY OUR PARK PLEASE DON'T LITTER" with icons for recycling, no smoking, and no alcohol.



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## CEMENT HILL, CONTINUED

current president of the company.

### HAMLETT-DOBSON FUNERAL HOMES AND CREMATORY

It was 1915 when J. Fred Johnson convinced Clarksville, Tenn.-based James Hamlett, Sr., to leave the store where he was holding funeral services and move to Kingsport. Hamlett set up operations in "The Big Store" in Kingsport. In 1919, he was joined by Lawrence W. (Jimmie) Dobson. The two served as funeral directors at The Big Store until deciding the city deserved a stand-alone funeral home in 1926. They purchased the funeral department from The Big Store for \$3,200 and moved to a location on Charlemont Ave. just east of Church Circle.

"It was such a leap of faith that the men decided to buy a house from which to run the business, so that if it didn't make it, they would have some real estate," says Chad Correll, Hamlett-Dobson's president. Just under a century later, the firm still operates from that same real estate.

Hamlett-Dobson has kept a century-long service to the community running by changing with the community, says Correll. "When I came to work here 25 years ago we had a cremation rate of maybe 2 percent. Today that rate is around 30 percent. We saw a need then, so now we are able to control the cremation process from beginning to end. That helps us maintain quality."

In 2015 the company launched [simplecremationsonline.com](http://simplecremationsonline.com). The site allows people to make funeral plans for cremation at a lower cost by doing some things at a computer themselves. "I'm a third generation owner/operator," Correll says. Relying



Harold Childress (seated) and Chad Correll of Hamlett-Dobson Funeral Home and Crematory.

SEE CENTURY, 56

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## CEMENT HILL, CONTINUED

on his 16-21 year old children, his wife Beth, and Beth's father, Harold Childress, the company owner who is in his 55th year at Hamlett-Dobson, allows him to make decisions taking three generation's preferences into account.

### HUNTER SMITH AND DAVIS

Today's law firm of Hunter, Smith and Davis is directly descended from the attorneys who wrote the Kingsport Charter that was signed in 1917. The firm was founded in 1916 by Judge Hugh Graham Morison and Mr. F.M. Kelly.

Morison and Kelly had both worked extensively for John B. Dennis and J. Fred Johnson before forming their firm. Since Morison and Kelly had already worked with all the firms controlled by the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railway and its interested partners, it naturally flowed that when the firm of Morison, Kelly and Penn was formed it would have an enviable client list.

In 1921, that list included Kingsport Improvement Corp., Clinchfield Portland Cement Corp., Kingsport Stores Inc., CC&O Railway, Kingsport Farms Inc., First National Bank of Kingsport, Kingsport Utilities Inc., The Mead Fibre Co., and Tennessee Eastman Corp. It also naturally flowed that the firm would write Kingsport's charter.

Since that time, the names on the shingle have changed – Hunter was named a partner in 1935, Smith and Davis in 1947. The focus and scope of the firm have grown as well.

"After those initial days," says Steve Darden, managing

partner, "when the National Labor Relations Act was passed in 1935, it spawned a tremendous amount of union organizing in the United States and Northeast Tennessee was not exempt from that. In some circles our firm became known as a labor law firm. That's a major part of our legacy. But it's inaccurate to conclude that's all we had going on. We've had a strong litigation and corporate law presence throughout our existence."



**Steve Darden, managing partner,  
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The advertisement features a group of eight people (seven men and one woman) standing in a line outdoors in front of a building. They are dressed in business casual attire. The text is centered and uses a mix of bold and regular fonts. The Prosim logo is prominently displayed in the center.

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The advertisement features the bcti logo at the top, which consists of a stylized globe with circuit lines. Below the logo is a dark blue banner with white text. The main body of the ad is white with blue text. At the bottom, there is a photograph of a modern, single-story office building with a blue awning over the entrance. The bcti logo is visible on the building's facade. The contact information is presented in a dark blue banner at the very bottom.

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# THE KINGSPORT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE:

## From One Man to One Kingsport

By Scott Robertson

As has been mentioned elsewhere in this publication, at Kingsport's dawn, J. Fred Johnson was hired to be, among other things, a one-man chamber of commerce, seeing to the city's commercial needs. He was, literally, a one-man show.

But what happens when a one-man show closes? The show must go on.

In Kingsport's case, the duties of seeing that Kingsport continued to have a strong commercial economy were picked up by the Merchants Association. From their unified efforts, what is now the Kingsport Chamber of Commerce was born.

"Their idea that you could do more working together is not a new idea, and it makes perfect sense," says Miles Burdine, chamber president and CEO. "We always go back to the old Rudyard Kipling quote that the strength of the wolf is in the pack and the strength of the pack is in the wolf. That was their thinking back in those days and it still is our thinking."

The Kingsport Chamber budget dwarfs those of most similarly sized cities in Tennessee. Because of its relatively large resource pool, the chamber enjoys a good deal of what Burdine, a retired Marine who has been CEO since 1999, refers to as *wasta*, an Arabic word loosely translating to clout or influence.

"We are the same size as the chambers in communities much larger than ours – Chattanooga, Knoxville, Murfreesboro," Burdine says. "The only ones larger than us in terms of budget, projects and personnel are Nashville and Memphis."

For that, Burdine credits past volunteer chairs, who, he says, have known how to get things done. "Chambers themselves don't have the authority to make things happen. We can't raise taxes. We can't get people elected. What we have is the credibility to bring the people together who can do whatever is necessary to make good things happen."

The creation of FunFest is one of the events most commonly associated with the Kingsport Chamber. In the early 1980s, divisive issues facing Kingsport had driven a figurative wedge through the town.

"The leadership of the Chamber said, 'Let's throw a party where we invite everybody to set aside our differences and have fun.' The original title was, 'Community Unity' and it still provides that today."

Just so, each year more than 1,800 people attend the chamber's annual meeting, a gala event held at the MeadowView Conference, Resort and Convention Center and coordinated by Bob Feagins, communications and development executive director.

The chamber oversees the work of the Kingsport Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Kingsport Office of Small Business and Entrepreneurship (KOSBE). "Underneath every program, there are lots of different events and projects," Burdine says. "The CVB staff, for instance, does so much to put heads in beds. They lower the amount of taxes every citizen pays by bringing in visitors. Aundrea Wilcox and her small staff at KOSBE take a small budget and help many small businesses start and grow here in Kingsport. Government Relations lobbies to protect our businesses – to support legislation that could help business and oppose legislation that could hurt business. And the chamber works with the city government – the staff and the leadership – to build a culture in which it is easy to do business in Kingsport."

The chamber helps build young professionals into community leaders through its Leadership Kingsport program and helps recruit new leaders to the community with the Move to Kingsport program.

Keep Kingsport Beautiful and Healthy Kingsport address quality of life issues. "Keep Kingsport Beautiful knows how to take \$50,000 from the city of Kingsport and turn it into a budget of \$100,000 and then do so much with it. Robin Cleary does a great job writing grants."

"Healthy Kingsport is a good example of how this community operates. We realized we had a problem. Instead of running from it, we recognized it and decided to do something about it," Burdine says.

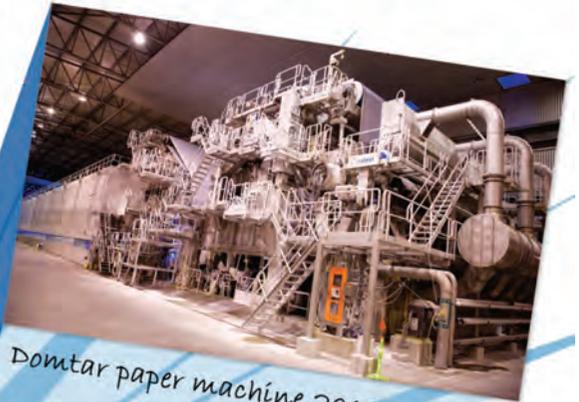
"When there's a problem, people call the chamber and ask if we can get involved and help. It's good to have that kind of credibility, but with that comes great responsibility. We work hard to continue to earn that trust."

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# BUSINESS COMMUNITY HAS LONG HISTORY OF ROTARY SERVICE

By Scott Robertson

If any single organization could be said to have fostered the Kingsport Spirit over the decades, Rotary would be the leading candidate. The club conducted Kingsport's first newspaper recycling effort. It has built Habitat houses. It collects new clothes for needy children. And it gives Kingsport's business leaders an outlet through which to serve.

Several civic organizations have benefitted Kingsport through its history, but Rotary Club has been a hub of business leadership since its inception on Oct. 24, 1923. That inception came at a dinner in which more than 150 Rotarians and their wives traveled to Kingsport from as far as Abingdon and Morristown to see the club receive its charter.

Lacking a Chamber of Commerce in its early years, Kingsport found some tasks normally undertaken by a chamber were naturally performed by the Rotary Club. In 1937, for instance, the club published a book designed to assist the city in its economic development efforts. While today's economic development pitches are made using online video streaming presentations, eight decades ago the city's features and benefits were catalogued in a 234-page hardback book, printed and bound in Kingsport.

Rotarian J. Fred Johnson wrote the preface, stating, "An earnest attempt has been made to keep it free from any trace of the bombastic and to portray a bit of the real romance which it is believed exists in the hitherto untold stories of business."

But the hallmark of the club has been service. In 1939, the club operated the city's bowling alley for six months of the year. All profits went to buying milk for indigent schoolchildren. Rotary funded the construction and maintenance of a Girls Scout camp, Camp Hide-away in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The club was instrumental in funding the Palmer Memorial Center for Crippled Children as a tribute to its third president, Col. E.W. Palmer, president of Kingsport Press. The center was named for Palmer after he convinced 28 Rotarians to raise funds in the community for its construction and operation.

The club's roster over the years has been a Who's Who of Kingsport business. Current member Wirt Taylor was proposed for membership by Allen Dryden, Sr., the man who opened Kingsport's first architectural firm in 1920. Taylor took the Hardware classification for the club, replacing S. F. Dobyms, another charter member who along with Taylor's father had purchased both Kingsport Hardware and the hardware department of J. Fred Johnson's store to create Dobyms-Taylor.

"They were very restrictive on who they had at that time," Taylor remembers. "If you worked at a bank, you had to be the bank president. Eastman was allowed only seven people. Toy Reid (Eastman president) was in Rotary. But I remember the treasurer at Rotary blackballed an Eastman employee because that employee didn't have a high enough executive position."

The blackballing went by the wayside 30-40 years ago, Taylor says, but he appreciates many of the values his Rotary elders helped



**Wirt Taylor (standing) and Dr. Robert Jones are two of the longest-standing Kingsport Rotary Club members. Taylor has logged 50 years of perfect attendance, while Jones recently joined the city of Kingsport in enjoying a 100th birthday celebration. The plates being displayed are from the first and 50th years of the Kingsport Club's existence.**

instill in him. For instance, he says, those founding fathers of Kingsport impressed upon him the importance of duty and responsibility. "In the first 25-30 years of Rotary, we had over 90 percent attendance. If you missed a meeting, they would call you that day or the day after and take you – and it was not an option – they would just pick you up and take you to make up your meeting at Johnson City or Gate City or wherever."

Dr. Robert Jones has not been a member for as long as Taylor, but has seniority in another way. Jones, like Kingsport, is celebrating his 100th year in 2017. Jones was the first urologist in the Tri-Cities, having come to the Veterans Administration facility at Mountain Home before moving on to serve for many years as a doctor and one year as president at Indian Path Hospital.

"I'm particularly proud of what Rotary has done with the polio program, because that's related to medicine," Jones says. "Before 1962 we had nine iron lungs and most of the time they were active keeping people alive. Rotary played a part in the fact that now polio is eradicated around the world except for two or three countries."

"We also built a medical and dental center in Haiti," Jones says. "Rotary does so much good in the world."



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# PEAK:

## Young professionals look to drive Kingsport's future success

By Lynn J. Richardson

In October 2013, a then-29-year-old Kingsport real estate agent, Seth Jervis, and some of his colleagues, began a conversation that led to development of an organization that de-cliques young professionals, engaging them with each other and their city. That organization is PEAK - Professionals Engaged in Advancing Kingsport. This year, as Kingsport celebrates its 100th birthday and looks back on all that has been accomplished, the members of PEAK are also looking forward to all Kingsport can be in the future.

To help the young professional community's voice be heard in planning for the next century, PEAK played a major role in the One Kingsport initiative. One Kingsport brought nearly 250 area residents together, working for two days to come up with ideas, dreams, and suggestions for projects they believed would help the city thrive in the future. Those 250 residents created a five-year plan offering more than 100 suggestions to make Kingsport better.

PEAK members were actively involved in the Kingsport One process from the very beginning, says Matt Storey, PEAK president.

"We were really engaged in Kingsport's One Kingsport Summit, and the Kingsport work group that came out of that," says Storey. "We had people embedded in each one of those groups." Around 90 of PEAK's members were involved in the original summit, says Emma Clark, PEAK secretary and associate director of the Downtown Kingsport Association. "When they broke off into individual work groups, we were right there," she says. "It was a great opportunity for us."

"This was an intentional intersection of young professionals wanting to be involved in Kingsport's future and the city saying 'we really want to hear that voice,'" Storey says. "We had the support of the City of Kingsport, the Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Kingsport Association. We also had the support of some strong business partners. That's why we've been so successful." There are many moving parts to PEAK, Clark says. Of the 125 members, almost all are engaged in the community in some way.

"Different people are involved in different things. This isn't just a social club or a professional development club. Out of those 125, most are active in one or more of the organization's components." The group is diverse. With ages ranging from 21-49, membership includes business owners, a partner in a law firm, not-for-profit directors, teachers, healthcare professionals and even fresh-out-of-college students who are trying to get integrated into the community.

There is not, Clark emphasizes, a concentration of members from any one local employer. PEAK's structure is designed to keep things – and people – fresh, Clark explains. "We have a one year board term to avoid burnout," she says. "We are constantly doing things, changing things up."

"The organization consistently has new people coming and going in the group," Storey adds. "And even though we are continually bringing in new people, that is the sustaining part too."

However Storey is quick to note the organization's mission is one thing that hasn't changed; PEAK's main goal is to "attract, develop and retain Kingsport's young professionals and that everything the organization does centers on five core components:



### Professionals Engaged in Advancing Kingsport works to unify young professionals with a civic spirit.

Social engagement, civic volunteerism, professional development, regional networking and talent recognition."

Its social engagement component allows members to network, personally and professionally, with other members of PEAK. It also gives them a chance to unwind from their busy workweek.

The group's professional development efforts bring in speakers, most who are leaders in the community. PEAK has also hosted debates for local elections as a service to the community and an opportunity for people to interact and be part of that process. "We all get requests from boards, non-profits and other entities to help fill positions. We are looked upon as a conduit for helping fill jobs," Storey says.

PEAK also puts great emphasis on volunteerism. "As part of our volunteer activities, we've established 'The Barking Lot,'" Clark says. "There was an area downtown that had been neglected and was overgrown. With the help from some amazing partnerships, we turned it into a beautiful little dog park right here in downtown."

As Phase Two, PEAK has also installed an ATRA - an Active Transportation Rest Area. "That includes shade, seating, water and a bike pump," Clark explains. Completed in 2016, she described it as a "big volunteer project."

PEAK also partners with other community organizations as well, working closely with Second Harvest Food Bank and having a PEAK member serve on the board of the United Way of Greater Kingsport each year. Last year, as part of FunFest, PEAK, working alongside the DKA, launched the first Busker Fest – a family-friendly event featuring multi-talented street performers. It was such a success, it will be repeated and expanded in 2017.

"This year's event will incorporate a multicultural aspect – Buskering Around The World," Clark says. "Last year we had street performers, with all types of arts and entertainment on the street. We hope to have even more this year, making the event more interactive. We hope it really makes an impact down here."

The projects are part of PEAK's commitment to make positive

change while holding fast to those things that make Kingsport special. “As we have people coming in and out of the organization, it does make the organization change what we offer. That way every year is different. We go to different places, change themes, have different events. That’s part of what we have to do to keep people engaged.

“We’re always trying to change what we’re offering – not the mission – but what the output is that someone will take away,” Clark adds. “I think that’s why we’re successful is because we’re always changing.”

“Change is something that is necessary for the city,” Storey says. “We as an organization recognize, that in order to reverse the population trend, you’re going to have to have new offerings, bring in new business, not rely on then same core of the industry you have.

“You don’t want constant change, though,” he adds. “We want to preserve some kind of small town feel. That is part of what’s so nice about Kingsport and we need that stability – a combination of both change and sameness. But it is change that will sustain our community and help it grow.”

“I hope Kingsport, 20 years from now, will have extracted some new businesses that are currently in different markets,” Storey says. “By then, we will have made an investment in downtown Kingsport as well as greater Kingsport. We will be leveraging this downtown space, and our recreational opportunities. We have a great footprint.

“I think it is key that we will be bringing people in to enjoy new offerings focused around arts, entertainment. But at the same time, we will be building upon the solid core that we have here.”

Storey says he believes the arts, dining and entertainment offerings can only be enhanced, because of the outdoor element

available in Kingsport. “You think about the typical arts, dining and entertainment. We need to leverage those into our outdoor offerings.

“We have recreational activities, mountains, rivers. So we need to think about dining that is established as a unique outdoor dining experience. We have Allendale’s outdoor theater, and Bay’s Mountain offers opportunities to enjoy being outside,” he adds. “Even shopping downtown is somewhat of an outdoor market. It has grown into that, and it has the potential to be that.”

“As a director of the downtown’s business association, of course I’m focused very heavily on downtown,” Clark says. “We have 400 acres down here. There is so much area to expand and utilize, and a lot of good things have happened in our downtown over the past three years.

Like Storey, Clark says she sees a lot of potential in the city’s outdoors. “We have Bays Mountain, and our river,” Clark notes. “We are starting to see kayaking and rafting develop on our river now. Before, we had just a few restaurants along the river, but now more and more are starting to pop up. It’s so important that we take full advantage of our riverfront and our other natural resources.”

“Kingsport is a great place to raise a family,” Clark says. “The sense of community and the spirit – I want to see that spirit alive over the next 100 years.”

In order to get a broader view of PEAK’s vision, the organization’s board of directors responded to a survey created by *The Business Journal*, designed to reflect the group’s priorities for Kingsport’s future.

Questions included those dealing with the city’s best assets,

SEE PEAK, 64

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**PEAK, CONTINUED**

it's biggest challenges and its "must haves" for a successful Kingsport tomorrow.

In order of importance, from most important to least, PEAK's board ranked maintaining Kingsport's small town character as its top priority.

Coming in second is attracting new business to the downtown area.

Protecting the environment and the city's natural resources ranked third, with improving access and traffic circulation by improving road infrastructure and expanding the parks and trails system tying for fourth. The group placed the least importance on attracting new businesses to the outlying areas of the city.

They place greatest importance for Kingsport's future in 20

years on developing a thriving arts and nature scene that enhances the downtown Kingsport "footprint, layout and infrastructure advantages," and "attracting scalable businesses in emerging industries (not just growth of the industrial and healthcare core)."

The group unanimously agreed that the "downtown scene" is one of Kingsport's "best asset," remarking that "the downtown scene has lots of potential."

They also praised the Kingsport's "natural landscape for recreational activities," and "quality of life provided through affordability."

The group also gave the city high marks for its "wonderful school system" and its people, who they described as "welcoming and caring."

They also say the "region must jointly produce business and population growth," and that "Kingsport needs to accelerate investment to improve its position to compete for a share of this growth."

As a whole, the PEAK board says Kingsport rates an "Excellent" as a good place to raise a family. It also gives "Good" ratings to the city's employment opportunities, environmental protection and recreational opportunities.

But areas that need more work include shopping, dining and entertainment, which they rank only "Fair." Diversity in the city was described as "Poor."

Most PEAK board members told us they live in Kingsport because "it is home" and they "love living here." Others indicated that Kingsport is their choice because it is close to work and is affordable with a downtown scene that has "a high future potential."

That future potential is what drives PEAK, Clark concludes. "Kingsport is a great place to raise a family," she says. "The sense of community and the spirit – I want to see that spirit alive over the next 100 years."

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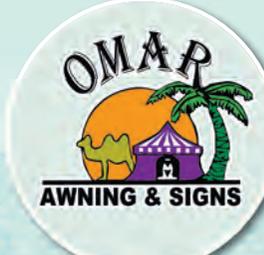
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Church Circle, 2017

## KINGSPORT 101



The central notion around which the Kingsport 100 celebration is built is “The Kingsport Spirit.” J. Fred Johnson defined that spirit in the foreword to the book, “Kingsport, Tennessee: City of Industries, Schools, Churches, Homes” published by the Rotary Club of Kingsport in 1937.

“Were I to undertake to define the spirit underlying every step in the growth and development of Kingsport, from the days of

its humblest beginnings until now, I could not avoid the assertion that the spirit, if it be a spirit, is one of mutual helpfulness and a willingness to submerge selfish interests beneath the individual effort to assure the greater good for the greater number,” Johnson wrote. “Rotary has a slogan ‘Service above Self – he profits most who serves best.’ Without attempting to eulogize, it is my firm conviction that those words truly epitomize what may be said to be the spirit of Kingsport.”

Over the course of a century, that spirit has ebbed and flowed. It can be argued the darkest times for the city have come when that spirit has been least in evidence, and that its reassertion through initiatives such as MeadowView and the Downtown

Academic Village have led to resurgences in the city’s success.

So too must that spirit be seen through the lens of time. The year of Kingsport 100 is an appropriate time for us all to ponder how we may be viewed by those who will celebrate Kingsport 200, and what actions we may take today to best acquit ourselves to future generations.

To that end, we turn again to Johnson. “So it has been and will continue to be with Kingsport,” he advised, “if it is not good for the community, it is not good for the individual or for the business activity within the community – in that we have a fundamental truth.”

On behalf of *The Business Journal of Tri-Cities, TN/VA*, thank you to the City of Kingsport and the Kingsport 100 Commission for your invaluable partnership on this publication. To the entire Kingsport business community, congratulations on the achievements of your first century and best wishes as an even brighter century dawns.

SCOTT ROBERTSON, MANAGING EDITOR

Church Circle, 1918



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