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Purely Business

Pure Foods opens for business in Kingsport

Pure Foods President John Frostad Photo by Tara Hodges

Plus:

The Changing Face of Health Care:
What Virginia and Tennessee want from
Mountain States and Wellmont

and

The octogenarian on the line

FEBRUARY 2016
\$3.00 Volume 28 Number 4



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a good offense.”

- Carl Torbush
Head Coach, ETSU Football

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Pure Foods opens for business in Kingsport: an economic development success story that's good for you.

Cover photo: John Frostad of Pure Foods.
Photo by Tara Hodges, Sweet Snaps Photography.



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The State of Tennessee



Governor Bill Haslam delivered his annual State of the State address the evening of Feb. 1 in Nashville. It was an upbeat message with the theme, “unique opportunity.” Of more substance was the inclusion of details regarding the governor’s proposed budget.

Conservatives love the fact that the governor is putting \$100 million into the state’s Rainy Day Fund. That fund will end the fiscal year at just over

two-thirds of a billion dollars. It’s important because Tennessee’s constitution mandates a balanced state budget. In lean years, Rainy Day dollars are used to prevent tax hikes.

State employees love the fact that the governor is including almost \$100 million in wage increases for them, with almost 40 percent of that earmarked for those rank-and-file workers who make less than \$50,000 annually.

The central focus of Haslam’s budget is education. He makes the largest contribution to K-12 history in Tennessee history (without a tax increase). The budget further funds Haslam’s Drive to 55 plan, including:

- \$50 million for the Complete College funding formula for higher education;
- \$20 million for the Drive to 55 Capacity Fund to help community and technical colleges meet the growing demand for degrees and certificates; and
- \$10 million for the Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP) helping communities align degree and course offerings with the needs of the local workforce.

In addition, the governor is proposing more than a half billion dollars to fund new buildings at UT-Memphis, UT-Chattanooga, Tennessee Tech and Tennessee State.

The response from the state Democratic Party leadership, such as it is, gave little in the way of specific rebuttal to the governor’s remarks about what’s happening in Tennessee, instead focusing on something that is not happening, Insure Tennessee.

“Governor Haslam has such pretty plans for the year. Sadly, though, our Republican Governor is not a leader,” said Mary Mancini, chair of the Tennessee Democratic Party. “Just look at Insure Tennessee, the health care plan he designed to attract Republican votes. Yet, even with a Republican supermajority in the House and Senate he couldn’t get it out of committee.”

“Even worse,” Mancini continued, “when the going gets tough, he gave up. He could have brought back Insure Tennes-

see. He could have used his leadership to pass a health care plan that would have saved lives and created opportunity. Instead, he caved to the extremists in his party.”

I agree with Mancini’s desire to have Tennessee accept the federal Medicaid dollars that are flowing now to other states. The notion that Tennessee is somehow doing something noble by not accepting those particular federal dollars is, at best, hollow, considering Tennessee has the third largest percentage of its total revenues from the federal government of any state in the union (39.5 percent, according to the *Washington Post* article, “Some of the most conservative states rely most on federal government aid” by Niraj Choksi, Jan. 6, 2016).

The simple fact of the matter is Tennessee’s legislators have no stomach for accepting federal dollars in a high profile way, such as voting for something that smacks of Obamacare. But they’ll take the dollars that are flowing into the state from Washington already, because they don’t have to take public responsibility for those.

So Mancini’s desire to have Haslam bring Insure Tennessee back to the legislature again in 2016 is tilting at windmills. She would have the governor waste everyone’s time with a doomed effort. That’s not efficient government.

Just so, legislators reportedly told the governor before the legislative session began they would not fund increases in highway spending until his administration had made a good faith effort to pay back into the highway fund the dollars that were taken from it to pad the general fund during leaner times. Haslam’s currently proposed budget puts \$130 million back. Now that’s just a drop in the bucket compared to the \$6 billion in projects awaiting funding. But Haslam is playing ball with the legislature, trusting they’ll give highway funding a fair shake next year. If they don’t, that’s won’t be Haslam’s fault, though Mancini may well skewer him for it anyway.

Haslam is right in saying the state is in far better shape financially than it has been in several years. And his pro-education stance is not just welcome, it’s necessary, given the gap between Tennessee and competing states in workforce readiness. Tennessee is going in the right direction. Hopefully the governor has the fortitude to stay the course and not be bogged down by nuisance-creating extremists on either side of the aisle.

December home sales cap boom of 2015

December homes sales surged topping off a record year for the housing market in the 11-county area monitored by the Northeast Tennessee Association of Realtors' Trends Report. There were 444 closings on existing home sales. That's a 19.4 percent improvement from December 2014. The annual total was 5,287, up 9.6 percent from 2014. December's average home sales price was \$159,445, up 7.5 percent from the same month last year. December's inventory was 4 percent lower than December last year. Inventory was tighter all year but not enough to exert a negative pressure on the market. The average single-family home sold last month was on the market for 150 days, down from 165 days a year earlier.

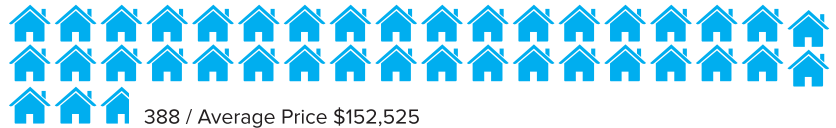
HOME SALES



- 10 EXISTING HOMES

■ December 2015 Home Sales
 ■ November 2015 Home Sales
 ■ December 2014 Home Sales

TRI-CITIES



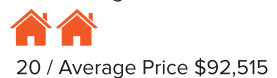
WASHINGTON COUNTY, TN



SULLIVAN COUNTY



CARTER COUNTY



GREENE COUNTY



WASHINGTON COUNTY, VA



NOTE: NETAR counts city sales as those made in a city's high school zone. City data is included in county totals.

Ups & Downs

A quick check of the conventional wisdom on who's going what direction in Tri-Cities business


↑ UVA-Wise – While most of us pine for more manufacturing jobs, it's a fact that retail has made up a large part of the employment growth in the Tri-Cities over the last year, especially when one nets out the jobs lost to layoffs at CSX and Sprint. The University of Virginia at Wise is offering a retail management and operations workshop series in April and May at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon. The curriculum includes sales and service, human resources, store operations, merchandising, and financial reporting. It's yet another example of a small school being nimble enough to directly address a need in the community workforce.

↑ Eastman sales and earnings, again – Eastman Chemical Co. sales revenue was \$9.6 billion for 2015, a 1 percent increase compared with 2014 due to sales of products of acquired businesses partially offset by lower selling prices. Excluding certain non-core items, operating earnings for 2015 were \$1.7 billion, a 6 percent increase compared with 2014 primarily due to earnings of the acquired businesses and lower raw material and energy costs exceeding lower selling prices. Reported 2015 operating earnings were \$1.4 billion compared with \$1.2 billion for 2014.

↑ Futbol – With the Super Bowl in the books, we can turn our attention to what the rest of the world refers to as football. The Tri-Cities will have a semi-pro soccer team for the first time in 2016. The Tri-Cities Otters FC will host seven home games from May through July at Science Hill High School's Kermit Tipton Stadium. The Otters will play opponents from the Carolinas, Georgia and West Virginia. We look forward to seeing how well semi-pro soccer draws compared to Appalachian League baseball. Conventional wisdom says baseball is graying and soccer is up-and-coming. We shall see.

↑ The FCC – While it's not specifically a local "up," we think it's one you'll be glad to hear about (unless you're an investor in DISH, DirectTV, Comcast or Charter). The Federal Communications Commission is, according to a Reuters News Agency story, about to tell these companies they can no longer force customers to rent TV-top boxes in order to receive TV service. As a customer, you may soon be able to receive your TV signal through a tablet, smartphone or computer. The FCC estimated in the Reuters story the average customer spends \$231 a year on box rental, which adds up to about \$20 billion nationwide. That number has gone up 185 percent in the last 20 years.

↓ Sprint – Blountville knows a little of what St. Louis is feeling these days. The gateway city opened its tax wallet to help fund a domed stadium for the St. Louis Rams 20 years ago, with the idea that it would be paid off in 30 years (St. Louis was poaching the Rams from Los Angeles). The Rams left St. Louis last month to return to their former home, leaving St. Louis with \$36 million left to pay on an empty dome. In 2011, taxpayer dollars went to fund the incentive package to convince Sprint to bring jobs across the state line from Bristol, Va. But last month, Sprint announced plans to shutter the Blountville facility. The company has every right to do so, of course. But it always leaves a bad taste in one's mouth to see a company take incentive dollars and run.












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Jeff Jones (right) passes the gavel to Joe Carr.
 Photos by Jeff Derby and Sarah Colson



Chamber President Gary Mabrey, 2016 Chair Joe Carr, Amzi Smith Award Winner Bill Greene and outgoing Chair Jeff Jones.

Johnson City Chamber 101st Annual Membership Meeting

The Chamber of Commerce Serving Johnson City, Jonesborough and Washington County hosted the first annual meeting of its second century Jan. 15 at the Millennium Centre. Bank of Tennessee's Bill Greene was named the third-ever recipient of the Amzi Smith Award. Retired SPS Executive Al Fatheree was named to the Chamber Hall of Fame. Outgoing Chair Jeff Jones handed off the gavel to 2016 Chair Joe Carr.



Lee Fatheree, Sallie Deaton, Lori Fatheree, Al Fatheree, Kerry & Bob Tripp



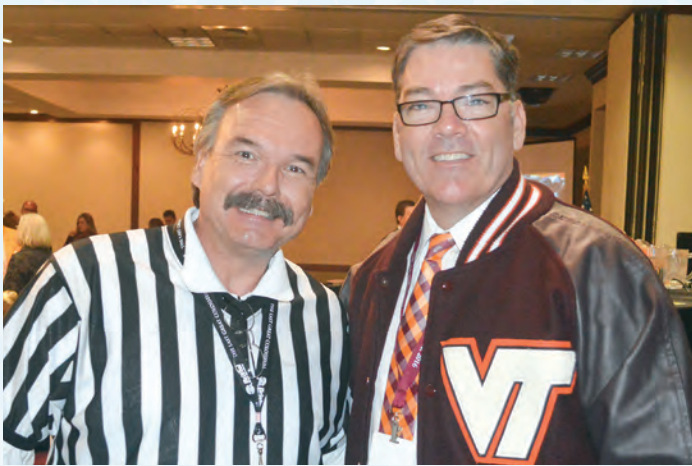
Hall of Fame inductee Al Fatheree



Jonesborough Mayor Kelly Wolfe with Johnson City and Washington County Commissioner David Tomita



Valda Jones with Brenda Whitson



Bristol Chamber Chair Jim Maxwell with former Virginia Tech Hokies football star Eric Smith. Photos by Scott Robertson



Tennessee supporter Dr. Bobby Griffin with former Volunteer quarterback Condredge Holloway

Chamber luncheon sports Battle at Bristol theme

The Bristol Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards Luncheon at the Bristol, Va., Holiday Inn took the form of a giant tailgate party for the Sept. 10 Battle at Bristol football game between Tennessee and Virginia Tech. The food was served tailgate style from a number of different member restaurants. The award recipients received MVP trophies, and the program featured an ESPN announcer talking with former Hokie and Volunteer football greats about the upcoming game.



Speedway Children's Charities Executive Director Claudia Byrd poses with ESPN's Dr. Jerry Punch, who served as master of ceremonies for the event



The mayors of Bristol, Tennessee and Virginia, Lea Powers and Archie Hubbard, flank Bristol, Tennessee City Manager Bill Sorah, who actually is a football official in his spare time.



Speedway Motorsports founder O. Bruton Smith was given the Chamber's Lifetime Achievement Award. Shown above are Maxwell, Food City President Steve Smith, Byrd, Bristol Motor Speedway Vice President and General Manager Jerry Caldwell and Bristol Chamber President Beth Rhinehart.



The Bristol Chamber of Commerce staff poses with Punch (center) after the event.

Pure Foods cuts the ribbon, and the calories

New world headquarters for manufacturer of healthy snacks opens

By Scott Robertson



John Frostad, president and CEO of Pure Foods told the crowd at the Jan. 29 ribbon cutting for the company's new world headquarters in Kingsport, "We're going to make this the healthiest snack food company in North America." It was not so long ago that the title of healthiest snack food company in North America would have been faint praise, along the lines of "the best hockey player in Ecuador." Today, however, changing demographics and better education about personal nutrition are making the healthy snack field a rapidly growing segment of the food industry with a constantly increasing number of competing companies and product offerings.

Small snack-makers are sprouting up at a craft brewery-like pace across the continent. Frostad, however, wants Pure Foods to be something more. In addition to creating its own product offerings, Frostad says, Pure Foods will work as a contract manufacturer for some of the other healthy food companies, while also creating products for retailers to sell under their own labels (think Terry's Chips at Food City, only in the natural food aisle).

Why here?

Frostad and his team have experience in the Tri-Cities, having operated Snack Alliance in Bristol for many years. They knew the quality of the workforce, and they correctly surmised they would receive a warm welcome from NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership, the State of Tennessee and the Kingsport Economic Development Board.

Another factor was getting the perfect building, brand new and ready to meet the company's particular needs. J.A. Street and Associates built the 88,000-square-foot facility in less than a year, with special features designed just for Pure Foods.

"We have multi-capability certifications in this plant – gluten-free, allergen controlled – all of that. Not a lot of manufacturers have that," Frostad said. "If you were to see the engineering diagrams of the flow of air, for instance, you would see that it only flows in one way." That's a necessity for being able to tell regulators and consumers that a food that is free of something is, in fact, absolutely free. "You can't have one little trace of anything," Frostad said.

The Kingsport facility is built for expansion. The packaging room has three

Pure Foods CEO John Frostad shows how much space is available for expansion at the company's new world headquarters and manufacturing center.

Photos by Tara Hodges, Sweet Snaps Photography.

machines, but it's built to house eight. There are three production lines. The building is ready for two more.

Currently, the company employs about 50 people, most of whom have been working at the two soon-to-be-phased-out facilities in southwest Virginia. The equipment and jobs from those sites will be moving to Kingsport in the next few weeks.

By the time Pure Foods hits its stated employment goal of 275 at the new facility in or before the year 2020, it plans to knock out the back wall and build on an additional 88,000 square feet of distribution center space.

Why the new building matters

It's not just the moving of air that makes Pure Foods new facility a difference-maker in snack food manufacturing, Frostad said. It's the processes that can only take place inside it.

"Nobody else can do what we do here, especially on the fresh fruit and vegetable side," Frostad said. "Our dehydration technology is new-to-world. It's patented, so nobody else can do it. We're able to take fruits and vegetables, dehydrate them down and directly integrate them into snacks. In fact, our patented dehydration technology allows us to maintain 95 percent of the nutrition of fresh fruits and vegetables that we then integrate into the snack foods we provide."

That, he said, translates into demonstrably healthier, tastier food.

"If you look at the snacks that are out there, they're not as healthy, even though they are purporting to be. Ours will be vegetables or fruit first. Ours will have 20 percent of daily nutrition. Ours will have high fiber. Ours will have protein and be functionally better for you. But the kicker is, with ours, you don't have to sacrifice taste. That's the whole goal."

So what's actually being made?

The first product line to roll out will be a cheeze puff (not cheese, this is a non-dairy, vegan product). "Today we are making the cheeze puffs as a foundational product from chickpea and lentille instead of traditional ingredients like corn or rice," Frostad said. "This creates more products with more complex carbohydrates that help satiate and give more protein and fiber.

"An interesting product we have on deck that we will launch in the next few months is called Trail Chip. The concept is taking trail mix and putting it into a convenient chip form without the fat. We integrate blueberries, cranberries and pumpkin and sunflower seeds. It really is a crossover snack. It's making the migration over what people are actually doing. People might eat a cracker or a cookie or a cheese puff. What we're doing is giving them choices so that when they snack, they can have a healthy snack whether it's sweet, salty or whatever."

"Another product we're coming out with is the Vegan Bite, which integrates broccoli with a nice cheddar alternative," Frostad said. "The broccoli is what you taste first. So as snacks go – sweet, salty, savory and so on, we're really blurring a few lines. And again, what gives us that capability is both the dehydrating operation and the




Frostad exchanges congratulations with Kingsport Mayor John Clark, to whom Frostad jokingly refers as, "my twin."

baking operation."

Following that, Frostad said, a "tsunami" of healthy new products will be produced, some of which will transcend snacking to be served as part of a meal. "We have the ability to produce in extruded form, what almost looks like a rice krispy for bar integration. We have partnered up with some folks here in Tennessee that will take our extruded product and form it into those bars. That's one example. We can do prepackaged salads. We can do a tortilla strip that's baked, not fried."

And retailers whose snack aisle offerings are dominated by Frito-Lay are eager to make room for Pure Foods products in their natural food sections, Frostad said. "Every inch counts in supermarket floor space. The interesting thing is, they want help getting healthier products. So they're coming to us and saying, 'Look, we want to support you.'

The same thing that's driving that eagerness on the supermarkets' part is what inspired the creation of Pure Foods in the first place, Frostad said. "They're seeing that people will make a healthy choice themselves because they want to eat something that's still tasty, but without all those calories and fat and simple carbohydrates and negative stuff. Our whole concept is to give them those alternatives. Our mantra is that better health comes from better snacking." 



Frostad receives best wishes from Tennessee Lieutenant Governor Ron Ramsey as Governor Bill Haslam looks on immediately following the Jan. 29 ribbon-cutting.

Regulators' role in proposed merger ramping up

By Jeff Keeling

The face of health care in the greater Tri-Cities is taking on a distinctively state-regulated appearance as Mountain States Health Alliance and Wellmont Health System draw closer to applying to Tennessee and Virginia for approval of their proposed merger. Activity is ramping up at both states' departments of health and attorney generals' offices in anticipation of an activist state role in any merged system's business.

You may not have heard of Malaka Watson, Jeff Ockerman or Erik Bodin, but they represent the changing face of health care in the Tri-Cities – despite the fact they work in Nashville and Richmond.

Their jobs? Craft regulation requiring any merged system to show the state:

- What it will spend, what it will charge and what it will earn;
- What it will do, how it will do it and how it will help consumers save money and get healthier; and
- How the change for the better system leaders say they're creating will outweigh the harm done by the fact the state is allowing the formation of a virtual monopoly.

If a Certificate of Public Advantage (COPA) is granted in Tennessee, and a Cooperative Agreement in Virginia, it will come after exhaustive work by people such as Ockerman, a Tennessee Department of Health (DOH) policy planner; Watson, a Tennessee DOH attorney; and Bodin, the director of the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) Office of Licensure and Certification. Two essential components – consumer protection and the betterment of population health – form the pillars of their work.

"It's definitely uncharted territory, and it's something new for us as well as Tennessee and the hospital systems," Watson, who

"I'm glad the state has taken a robust posture. They're taking it seriously, which takes away the argument that they're not providing adequate supervision."

- Alan Levine, CEO, Mountain States Health Alliance

drafted Tennessee's emergency rules, said during a late December interview with the *Business Journal* that also included Ockerman. "We really are trying to take a sort of panoramic approach in terms of looking at it from all angles. Population health is obviously high on the list, but balancing that with the economics and how it will impact consumers is a high priority as well, so we're trying to make sure we have the right resources to help us effectively evaluate the application once we receive it."

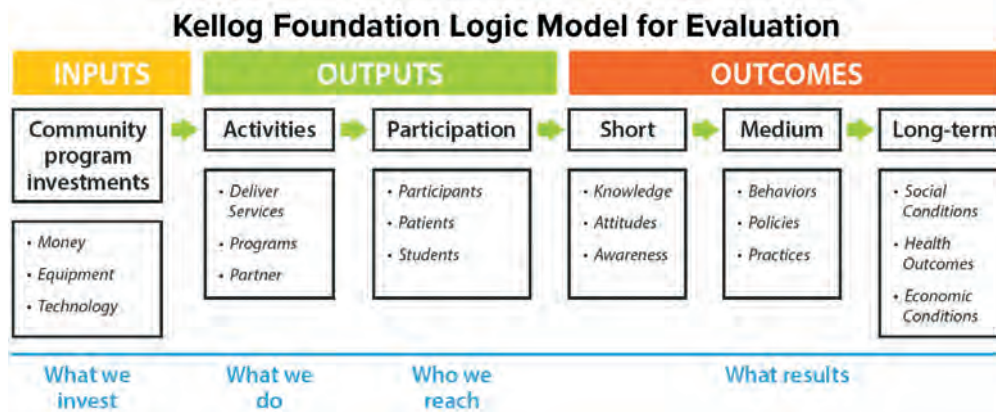
Wellmont and Mountain States are well past their initial target date (around Nov. 1, 2015) for filing a COPA application, likely owing to the endeavor's complexity. They did, however, submit a 34-page "pre-submission report" Jan. 7. By Jan. 15, DOH had parsed it and responded with a letter containing six "observations" accompanied by department positions. Like the systems' report, the observations ran the gamut from population

health details and impacts on payers to one that stood out for its likely interest to area residents – and showed just how transparent the systems will have to be.

The observation notes "limited detail" of plans to reduce duplication of costs post-merger, including through job cuts. The department observes that most other hospital mergers result in a reduction of full-time equivalent positions, and says it needs additional detail. "Specifically," the letter notes, "the department will require a good faith estimate of the number of full-time equivalent positions estimated to be eliminated each year, or if none, other plans to achieve stated efficiencies."

Three primary tasks lie ahead of Watson, Bodin, Ockerman and their colleagues: making the rules governing a merger effective and defensible; helping their respective commissioners of health (John Dreyzehner in Tennessee and Marissa Levine in Virginia) determine whether the merger applications justify approval; and representing those commissioners in the "active state supervision" designed to protect the public and to make any merger hold up under judicial antitrust scrutiny. Both states specifically wrote or rewrote laws to allow for a merger with a clear eye toward previous federal interference (primarily from the Federal Trade Commission but also the Supreme Court) in previous mergers that reduced competition. Both states' laws mention prominently a state policy to displace hospital competition with regulation, and

actively supervise that regulation, "to promote cooperation and coordination among hospitals in the provision of health services and to provide state action immunity from federal and state antitrust law to the fullest extent possible to those hospitals..."





Malaka Watson

“The department understands the gravity of the changes that are occurring all over the country, in terms of healthcare organization and delivery of health care, and the financing environment of health care,” Ockerman

said. “To take it down more to this regional level and whether approval of a COPA could strengthen the economic viability of these systems even though it weakens competition – how does that end up working to the advantage of the public, especially in terms of improving population health?” These are all questions that we have and are thinking about every day seriously.”

When Ockerman and Watson spoke with the *Journal*, a DOH team including planners, analysts and attorneys was in the middle of due diligence, preparing to move Tennessee’s rules from emergency to permanent status. The complexity of that task was highlighted by their acknowledgement they wouldn’t have time to respond to comments on the initial rules, draft proposed changes and hold hearings before the emergency rules expired Jan. 10. Yet with the hospital systems already well past their initial early November goal for COPA and Cooperative Agreement applications, DOH needed to keep the train on the track. So its rules became “permanent” Jan. 10, but will be subject to pending changes drafted by DOH personnel and possibly modified after public hearings.

COPAs are rare birds but this one is unique

Given the American bias toward free markets, anti-competitive hospital system mergers as significant as a Wellmont-MSHA marriage are rare. COPA laws exist in a number of states but few COPAs actually have been granted (Tennessee’s law actually existed for years before the current situation, but had never been used). Those that have, DOH’s Ockerman said, have primarily addressed consumer protection. But those, including an oft-cited one from 1995 that allowed Mission and St. Joseph’s hospitals in the Asheville, N.C. market to merge, were primarily granted before healthcare reform brought a focus on improving population health.

“Population health and access to health services as well as the economic impact on the consumers are the three primary things,” Ockerman

Select Measures from County Health Rankings

Service Area Health Rankings By State, County or City	Overall State or County Health Rank	Percentage of Adults Reporting Fair or Poor Health	Percentage Of Adults That Are Obese	Percentage of Adults Who Are Currently Smokers	Percentage of Children In Poverty	Drug Poisoning Mortality Rate per 100,000 Population
Tennessee	43rd	19%	32%	23%	27%	16
Carter	48/95	23%	29%	31%	34%	20
Cocke	88/95	27%	31%	21%	41%	21
Greene	59/95	21%	32%	29%	30%	22
Hamblen	54/95	26%	30%	23%	29%	27
Hancock	93/95	29%	30%	40%	45%	42
Hawkins	64/95	26%	35%	26%	31%	26
Johnson	44/95	26%	31%	28%	38%	11
Sullivan	36/95	22%	33%	26%	28%	17
Unicoi	68/95	26%	30%	23%	29%	24
Washington	19/95	19%	31%	24%	24%	17
Virginia	21st	14%	28%	18%	16%	9
Buchanan	132/133	29%	29%	30%	33%	37
Dickenson	130/133	31%	29%	32%	28%	53
Grayson	74/133	20%	32%	22%	29%	Not reported
Lee	116/133	29%	29%	25%	39%	14
Russell	122/133	29%	35%	25%	26%	32
Scott	114/133	23%	34%	28%	27%	14
Smyth	123/133	29%	31%	22%	26%	15
Tazewell	133/133	29%	30%	21%	23%	37
Washington	82/133	19%	32%	24%	21%	13
Wise	129/133	24%	32%	33%	28%	38
Wythe	85/133	27%	30%	24%	22%	18

University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. County Health Rankings 2015. Accessible at www.countyhealthrankings.org

² America’s Health Rankings 2015 Annual Report. <http://www.americashealthrankings.org/VA> and <http://www.americashealthrankings.org/TN>

erman said. “There are potentially other areas of interest that will come up, but particularly from the Department of Health’s perspective, the health of the population in that region is of really primary concern to us, and if there’s a way that we can all help improve the health statistics in that area, we’d be happy to have that be the end result.”

To that end, the emergency rules have significant requirements regarding the creation of measures to “continuously evaluate the Public Advantage of the results of actions approved in the COPA.” Those include improvements in the population’s health that exceed measures of national and state improvement. Similarly, the Virginia rules, which Gov. Terry McAuliffe signed into law Jan. 18, devote plenty of ink to population health. Virginia’s rules charge its health commissioner with developing the population health piece, both during selection of measures for reviewing the cooperative agreement’s proposed benefits, and during ongoing monitoring if a merger takes place. The chart on this page, which is included in the hospital systems’ pre-submission report, indicates

the severity of the gap between Southwest Virginians’ population health and that of their fellow Virginians.

“Virginia has been working on ... a population health improvement plan,” Bodin said in a Feb. 3 interview. “One of the things we’re looking at is how we evaluate this cooperative agreement request, and the ongoing monitoring and performance, and aligning that with that plan to see if that provides us with an opportunity.”

As early as their April 2, 2015 announcement of a planned merger, Wellmont and Mountain States mentioned a population health element. Their Jan. 7 pre-submission report outlined a four-pronged approach in its “Commitment to Improve Community Health,” on which it pledged to spend at least \$75 million over 10 years.

The focus areas include “ensuring strong starts for children” with programs designed to improve measures ranging from childhood obesity and neonatal abstinence syndrome to the number of children reading on grade level

SEE REGULATORS, 14

REGULATORS, CONTINUED

by third grade; “helping adults live well in the community” with focuses on diabetes, heart disease and several cancer types; “promoting a drug free community;” and “decreasing avoidable hospital visits and ER use” by helping “high-need, high-cost” uninsured people access care at earlier stages and reduce expensive critical care use.

Community health, in turn, is one of six key areas in the report, which hints strongly at what will go in the systems’ actual applications. Other areas are enhanced health services, expanded access and choice, investing in research, attracting and retaining a strong workforce, and improving healthcare value by managing quality, cost and services.

The document concludes with big vision statements and bold claims, including that savings from reduced service duplication and improved coordination will produce annual spending designed to improve public health equivalent to the capability of a \$750 million foundation. New services and capabilities, improved choice and access, managed costs

and investment in addressing the region’s economic development and its most vexing health problems – all are promised results of the merger.

On the Tennessee side, DOH wants to be sure the final application (the systems’ letter of intent to file expires March 15) includes sufficient details in all aspects. In addition to its position on job reductions, the department’s other observations highlight just how activist the state will be should a merger occur. One relates to regional health and population health disparities, calling for, “granular detail” about “factors that influence the health and health disparities of counties, communities, and groups within them, particularly as it relates to the applicants’ current assessment of existing trends and long-term population health outcomes.”

The letter, signed by Allison Thigpen of the Division of Health Planning, acknowledges the systems may plan to address each observation in their final application, but wanted to alert them, “in the event you had not anticipated and addressed them in the application.”

In October 2014, Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources Dr. Bill Hazel addressed the changes in healthcare market dynamics, and how they might relate to a local merger request during an interview with the *Business Journal*. His words, which also touched on population health, seem prescient today.

“I think it probably is a reach to say the markets are working real well in health care right now, so it would not be unusual to say, then, ‘well what are our other choices?’ In Virginia we are typically market/competitive-based and that’s what I think the General Assembly thrives on. So just guessing, it would be an interesting argument to make that we should substitute a market-based economy, or a perceived market-based economy, with one that is highly regulated.”

It’s an argument Hazel’s Virginia counterpart Bodin will have a major hand in deciding. “That’s the whole balancing act,” Bodin said. “Do the benefits afforded to the citizens outweigh the disadvantages that the loss of competition presents? In a nutshell, that’s one of the biggest evaluation points.” ■

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Holston Medical Group staying patient

By Scott Robertson

Holston Medical Group will be impacted greatly by whatever decision the states of Virginia and Tennessee make regarding the Mountain States-Wellmont proposed merger. To date, however, HMG has not spoken with either state formally, choosing to wait and see what the hospital groups will say in their COPA requests.

That fact doesn't mean HMG is unconcerned. "We have the same concerns I think everybody has," CEO Scott Fowler told *The Business Journal* in late January. "How do we protect this incredible investment the community has made in its hospital systems? I think the Wellmont Foundation is \$400 million of community money. The hospitals are the place where health care has been invested in by the community. So we want the hospitals inside our environment to be strong and stable.



Dr. Scott Fowler Photo by Scott Robertson

"The hospitals have said, 'We need to merge because it's our only real chance of viability,'" Fowler continued. "We're for that if it can still be done while managing the change to value. We're waiting to see what that means in terms of what they're willing to do."

Fowler says part of the reason both systems spent in ways that made little long-term sense in the past was the fact they had money to spend. A merged company, he says, will have the ability to borrow even more. "We don't want to see this become an extension of what we had, just getting access to more capital to control markets. Hopefully the government will manage that.

"We have a great amount of faith in both the willingness to do the right thing


by Alan Levine and Bart Hove, and trying to figure out how to do this," Fowler said. "But they have their primary obligation to keep those hospital systems strong and basically in control of the environment."

And while HMG has no formal place at the table, Fowler said, both systems have had C-level discussions with him. "We have been working back and forth. There

are two key components for us. One is the absolute unrestricted, unblocked access to the data we need to take care of patients. This business about not sharing data with doctors in order to somehow protect the patient – that doesn't fly. They have given reassurance we will have access to that data after the merger.

"The second thing is, as we move from the model where the hospital is the center of the universe to a more integrated

model of care, we have to have the ability to do outpatient things that we currently can't do under the Certificate of Need (CON) law. In our region, for instance, there are virtually no outpatient surgery centers that are not controlled by hospitals. We need control of outpatient services in order to balance things. The hospitals are very aggressive if we try to get a CON. They say it's not needed. Those are the two things we have stood on.

"We want the ability to compete with them," Fowler said, "especially in those areas where their monopoly gives them a lot of power, but there's not a reason to have a monopoly, like outpatient services or physician services. We're not asking for a guaranteed advantage, but we should certainly be allowed to compete." 

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How NETWORKS networks

It's who they are and what they do

By Scott Robertson

(Editor's note: When Clay Walker, CEO of NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership met with The Business Journal for this article on Jan. 21, there was half a foot of snow on the ground outside the NETWORKS offices and Walker was, in his own words, "eating cough drops like candy." Shortly thereafter, he entered the hospital, missing the Pure Foods grand opening he'd worked so hard to facilitate, Jan. 29. The Business Journal thanks Walker for speaking with us when he was under the weather and we hope our readers will join us in wishing him a full and speedy recovery.)

The old adage, "it's not what you know, but who you know" is true in most business, but to hear Clay Walker tell it, that truism is the golden rule of economic development. It's appropriate then, that the economic development organization Walker has run for the last two years is called NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership.

In 2016, Walker plans on taking Sullivan County's economic development efforts up a notch, by networking on a higher level than has been done in some time. That effort will be marked by two keystones. The first is Walker's acceptance of the position of chair-elect of the Tennessee Economic Partnership. The second is NETWORKS participation in the Site Selectors Guild Conference this month in Nashville.

The TEP

The Tennessee Economic Partnership is dedicated to marketing Tennessee as a prime location for business relocation and expansion. It is a public-private partnership of the state of Tennessee, the TVA and Tennessee's business and economic development community.

"I had been involved in the Tennessee Economic Partnership when I worked in middle Tennessee," Walker told *The Business Journal*. "I was on the board of directors at that time, and on the marketing committee. It was very helpful and has been



Clay Walker (right) with Beth Rhinehart, Bristol Chamber of Commerce president at the Chamber's annual awards luncheon Jan. 15.

Photo by Scott Robertson

a great asset to me in so many ways since I came to Tennessee."

It came as a shock to Walker when he arrived in Northeast Tennessee to find no community economic development professionals in the state's northeast corner were members of the TEP.

"I said, 'We have to join TEP,' and we did," Walker said. "There happened to be an opening for Northeast Tennessee on the board as well. They have X number of regional seats and then at large seats as well. They had an at large seat come open, so I was nominated and I took it. This past year I got a call asking if I would consider being chair in two years, chair-elect and secretary-treasurer this year. They do that typically, letting you become secretary-treasurer while you're chair-elect because it gives you a lot of insight into the finances and helps prepare you better for your chairmanship."

While holding the title of chair-elect

is certainly a nice feather in Walker's cap, the real value lies in what it can mean for Sullivan County.

For instance, NETWORKS has gotten help from the TEP in its own efforts to showcase the county through its Bristol Motor Speedway Red Carpet Tours for site selectors. "You can do that on your own," Walker said, "but to get the strength of the state behind you, you need to do it under the TEP umbrella, and they also have some cash grants for that. We have been awarded \$1,000 per consultant to help with expenses both times we have done that.

But it's not just the grant funds that come in handy. Properly leveraged, TEP membership can boost an organization's reputation immensely, Walker said. "I jumped at the chance to be chair-elect because you want to show that your community is a meaningful partner in economic development in Tennessee, that you're not just along for the ride."

Playing a prominent role in the TEP also helps keep Sullivan County top-of-mind among decision makers in Nashville. Most major prospects come to communities through the Department of Economic and Community Development. Sullivan County is geographically about as far from Nashville as one can be in Tennessee. So having a consistent professional presence in the state capital reinforces the idea that Sullivan County deserves to be considered a real player when site selectors come calling.

"That's where you've probably heard us talk about our recruit-the-recruiter strategy," Walker said. "We have to be sure we are constantly giving the folks in the Department of Economic and Community Development information about product development, new buildings opening up, anything with economic development newsworthiness that can help them sell so they have a good understanding of what we are and what we offer. It has to be persistent and consistent so they understand what our brand is and from where it grew. It's

a constant process.” And that process, Walker said, is accomplished most easily from a seat on the TEP Board.

The Guild

The second keystone to NETWORKS’ 2016 networking efforts is its leadership role in the Site Selectors Guild Conference in Nashville. The Guild’s conference has gained importance in the last few years because site selectors have, in large part, stopped attending conferences hosted by third parties (many of which no longer exist as a result). They now host their own event, and space is at a premium.

Between 40 and 48 of the nation’s top consultants are at the Site Selectors Guild’s meeting each year, Walker said. “It’s hard to get into because they limit the seats so the communities that do participate can have good face time with the consultants who handle the projects. So it’s a great group to get in front of.” There’s even a competitive bid process to host the conference, with an attendant news conference reminiscent of the announcements of World Cup or Olympic host cities.

Walker’s previous tenure in middle Tennessee helped NETWORKS line up its sponsorship of the conference. A former colleague let him know Nashville would host the event before that knowledge became public.

“Courtney Ross, who is in charge of recruiting for the Nashville Chamber said to me, ‘I’m trying to get key organizations from across the

state to commit.’ I jumped in. I believe we were the first commitment she had. I said, ‘would it be within our budget?’ She said, ‘I believe the top level you would be eligible for would be \$10,000.’ I said, ‘We will do that. That’s a no-brainer.’”

“If you went to the conference as an attendee you’d have to spend \$4,000 to \$5,000,” Walker explained. “So we spend \$10,000 and we’re a sponsor. We get plugged in. And we make that statement to all the economic development organizations across the state and to the consultants coming in that these are the economic development players. When your name is up there with Clarksville, Chattanooga and Knoxville, they know you’re for real.”

Results

The buzz about Sullivan County shows the state now considers NETWORKS to be “for real,” Walker said. “Before we get leads, we might hear from the state saying, ‘You know, we can only give this company our top four leads, but we wanted to talk with you first to feel you out and see whether you’ll really be one of those four...’ The numbers for those calls are off the charts. This stuff is working.

“The more you work with the state, and the more you show you will not embarrass them, but instead you will make them proud of the job you did, the more they will call you,” Walker said. “We’re excited right now because they’re calling us all the time about projects.”

Mike Smith preaches teamwork to economic developers

ETSU alumnus and former Atlanta Falcons Head Coach Mike Smith gave a pep talk to the region’s power distributors and economic development professionals at the Jan. 7 meeting of the Regional Industrial Development Association in Johnson City. Smith told the crowd the Tri-Cities economic development community is like a football team. “To coach an NFL team, you have 53 independent contractors,” Smith said. “They’re all working for their own brand, they all have their own way that they’re approaching things and as a coach, you’ve got to bring all 53 of those guys together with a common goal. Really, that’s what we have here with this organization. We have a common goal to make Northeast Tennessee a better place. When you collaborate, you agree as a group to do something together for a common goal. Really that’s what this group is all about. There’s a common goal to make Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia a better place to live.”



Mike Smith Photo by Jeff Keeling



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ETSU's Carl Torbush expresses gratitude to Bristol Motor Speedway General Manager Jerry Caldwell (left) for staging the Bucs Sept. 17 football game against Western Carolina. Photo by Scott Robertson

Bucs will also battle at Bristol

By Scott Robertson

What do you call a 160,000-seat stadium with 10,000 fans in the seats? A fantastic opportunity turned into a rousing success, if it's September 17, 2016. One week after the sold-out Pilot Flying J Battle at Bristol football match-up between the University of Tennessee and Virginia Tech, the football field at Bristol Motor Speedway will host its second game, as East Tennessee State University and Western Carolina University square off. The Bucs-Catamounts game was announced at a press conference at the speedway Jan. 28.

The game will be ETSU's first conference contest as a newly reconstituted member of the Southern Conference, and staging it at BMS brings an appropriate sense of occasion to the affair, said ETSU Head Football Coach Carl Torbush. "We are very appreciative of Jerry Caldwell and everyone at BMS in making this happen. They are great supporters and friends of our program. It has taken a lot of hard work from those at BMS, ETSU, Western Carolina and the Southern Conference in putting all this together and we are thrilled to be making this announcement. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for our players, coaches, staff, university and fans."

The speedway, which operates under

the motto "Exceed expectations" will make the investment to provide the extra touches that make it more than just a large venue, said Jerry Caldwell, executive vice president and general manager of BMS.

"It's not easy – opening these doors," Caldwell said. "There are people that have to take the tickets. There are people who have to run the concession stands. There are people who have to check for security purposes as you go around. We don't just open the gates and let an event happen. We want an adequate number of people parking cars and an adequate number of people just providing customer service – answering questions. We also want to put on a show. We want to add our bells and whistles. There has got to be some stuff going boom and bang. So you'll see some aspects of that."

"This is obviously a different level than some of the other events – a Battle at Bristol or the NASCAR Cup races, but we're going to make sure that we treat this with the nature that we always treat things," Caldwell said. "If you're going to do it, do it well."

ETSU season ticket holders will receive a general admission ticket to the game at BMS with their season ticket package. Reserved seating upgrades and parking will be available when purchasing ETSU season

tickets. An allotment of ETSU student tickets will be available through the university at a later date. Other guests planning to attend may place a deposit through the BMS ticket office.

Seating for the event will be concentrated on the south side of the giant facility, with the most expensive seats on the track near the sidelines. Ticket prices will run from \$15 for youth to \$55 for "Battlefield Level" seats.

Caldwell said hosting the game fits into the speedway's community outreach campaign called, "It's MY Bristol, Baby!" The campaign encourages local residents and businesses to feel a sense of ownership - a part of the family - of the speedway.

"It is an investment in the community. We are in partnership with ETSU whenever we're selling tickets. We'll both benefit from that. But this really is viewed as more of a 'Let's do something that's good for everybody around here and something that's good for ETSU' kind of thing. The folks at ETSU are like family to us anyway. As you look around and see what other things there are that we can do as we have this field set up, this was a natural. It will be a lot of fun for a lot of people." ■



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The octogenarian on the assembly line

Charles Bowers is celebrating a quarter-century at BTL Industries at the age of 85

By Sarah Colson and Scott Robertson

Charles Bowers rises at 3:58 every morning to make it to his manufacturing job by 5 a.m. He works four ten-hour shifts each week and loves his work. The same could be said of all his co-workers. But the difference between Bowers and his colleagues is Charles Bowers is 85 years old.

Bowers could teach a master class in work ethic, if there were such a thing, and Greeneville's BTL Industries is glad to have him, not only for his work, but because that work ethic makes the entire company better.

"We have to have a dependable workforce and somebody that will be there every day," General Manager Matt Latts says. "We need employees who do their job as they're supposed to and meet the quality standards that we're required to meet. Charles really is a model of that. He is extremely dependable and has been for a very long time. He's getting the job done like he's supposed to but he also provides some energy and life to the manufacturing staff."

For the first few hours each day, Bowers cuts copper pieces into specified lengths for the company's main customer, ERMCO. Then he works the last six hours of his shift on the assembly line.

"Work, whether at BTL or on the farm, is my best friend," Bowers says. "I love to work. Some of us are cut out to do these things and some of us are not. And I'm cut out for it."

Latts said Bowers' work ethic inspires his other 75 full-time employees.

"First of all, our average worker is here for 16 years," Latts said. "So we have a group of employees who have been together for so long, they're just like part of the family. Charles is an inspiration not only from a work ethic standpoint but also overall as a good person to all of our employees as they come on board."

That work ethic comes from a lifetime on the farm. In fact, Bowers jokes that he works to support his farming habit. For the



Charles Bowers at his station on the assembly line at BTL Industries in Greeneville. Photo by Scott Robertson

better part of his first six decades on earth, Bowers worked the land, along with his wife Wanda, who is still the light of his life. "Each day was a struggle from four in the morning to the dark of night," Bowers says of farming, "while being plagued with worries over drought, mastitis, crop failure, and a multitude of other problems. But a good sale of the year's tobacco crop, the sight of a newborn calf, or the harvesting of a crop of hay and getting it stored before it rained made it all worthwhile."

After years of hard farm work and declining cattle sales, Bowers started looking for a career that would still allow him to continue working his small farm. He remembered having met Terry Leonard at Leonard's men's clothing store back in the 1950s after Bowers returned from his time in the service. "I couldn't

have afforded to buy much from him. Maybe I bought a pair of socks," Bowers says.

Leonard and Bowers became friends that day, so when Bowers began looking for his second career, he talked with Leonard. Soon Bowers was working for BTL, now run by Leonard's son, Watson Leonard.

"We do a lot of work that has a very short window from the order to when it's got to be out the door and they understand that and embrace that opportunity and that challenge," Leonard says. "We don't have a lot of young people come in or new people come in but when they do, they tend to be very successful and they tend to grow fast. I think everybody else's mentality rubs off on them."

On the farm, on the assembly line, or in the classroom, Bowers says the most important characteristic of success is and always will be good, old-fashioned hard work.

"I went to an agricultural class after I got out of the service and I learned a lot from them," he said. "That teacher said, 'Men, don't ever let your work push you. Push your work.' That was one of the best statements I ever heard. Stay ahead. That's what it meant. I still try to do that."

"It's a joy to work with people you can call 'friend,' who are hard-working, responsible people. It gives you a good feeling to know that the transformer parts you've been working on have benefited people without electricity during tragic weather conditions. I'm thankful to my co-workers and management for helping me feel needed and appreciated, and I want to express a special thanks to the Leonard family for giving an old man of 85 the opportunity to keep working these past 25 years, for I need to be busy to be satisfied." ■

Sweeping changes in broadcast industry reaching Tri-Cities

By Scott Robertson

If you're old enough to remember Archie and Edith Bunker singing, "Those were the days," then you may soon have a harder time recognizing the television broadcasting landscape, both locally and nationally.

Consider: In the US alone, digital advertising reached \$7.5 billion in 2015. Most of that came from what had been broadcast budgets. Direct-to-consumer channels that eschew traditional networks and cable/satellite systems are projected to reach 100 million US subscribers by 2018. Emmys are increasingly dominated by offerings from Netflix and Amazon. Traditional television is having to change its business model to remain competitive. As with many industries, consolidation is becoming the new normal. Late last month, for instance, the pending sale of Media General (which owns the CBS affiliate in the Tri-Cities) to Nexstar Broadcasting Group for more than \$2 billion was confirmed.

Those revolutionary changes in the industry are trickling down to the local market. Just days before the Media General/Nexstar deal was announced, the Tri-Cities' ABC affiliation went from Holston Valley Broadcasting's WKPT-TV 19 in Kingsport to the second digital signal offered by Media General's WJHL in Johnson City.

"For us, it's an affiliate agreement," says Dan Cates, WJHL general manager. "We did not buy another TV station that has a transmitter and a tower. We were approached because there was not a renewed or signed agreement with ABC. So we have the affiliate agreement. We are building a new TV station, but it will work within our current operations. It will broadcast on our secondary channel."

The move from analog broadcast to digital has made this possible, because each station can have multiple digital signals. WJHL's primary signal, which will continue to carry the CBS affiliation will broadcast on 11.1. The channel designation for ABC Tri-Cities will now be 11.2. Both will be broadcast from the same transmitter.

"In a lot of ways, it's a bigger world in the

broadcasting business, but in a lot of ways it's smaller," Cates says. "There are fewer companies that are much bigger now." He knows from whence he speaks. Cates has been in the television business for 32 years.


The current broadcasting era is a far cry from the old days when each small broadcaster served one community (and had to demonstrate to the FCC that it was operating in the public interest of that community in order to maintain its license to do so).

In those days, the Tri-Cities had a simple balance, as each city had a station with its own network affiliation. Bristol's WCYB 5 had the NBC affiliation. Johnson City's WJHL had the CBS affiliation. Kingsport's WKPT was ABC's affiliate. When the

Fox network became a national player, WEMT opened its doors in Greeneville. Today Fox Tri-Cities is under the WCYB umbrella, just as ABC Tri-Cities is now under WJHL's.

One way local affiliates keep viewers comfortable with these changes is to feature familiar faces on the newly oriented stations. WCYB veteran anchor Paul Johnson, for instance, teamed with Rebecca Pepin to form the news anchor team for Fox Tri-Cities when it moved under the WCYB umbrella.

When the ABC affiliation moved to WJHL's 11.2 signal, the company named Ann Carter as primary local news anchor. Carter, who was a colleague of WJHL anchor Josh Smith several years ago at WCYB, brings the new ABC Tri-Cities a recognizable face and well-established credibility in the market. Cates says the existing TV 11 news team will serve both the CBS and ABC viewers, with Carter anchoring separate 6:30 and 7:30 newscasts on ABC Tri-Cities. Both stations will simulcast the morning and midday news shows that currently air on WJHL.

Carter, who has been away from the cameras for most of the last four years, says of entering the new broadcast environment, "It's like being in line for a roller coaster. It's a little scary, but I'm also really interested in what's going to happen." 



Dan Cates



Ann Carter

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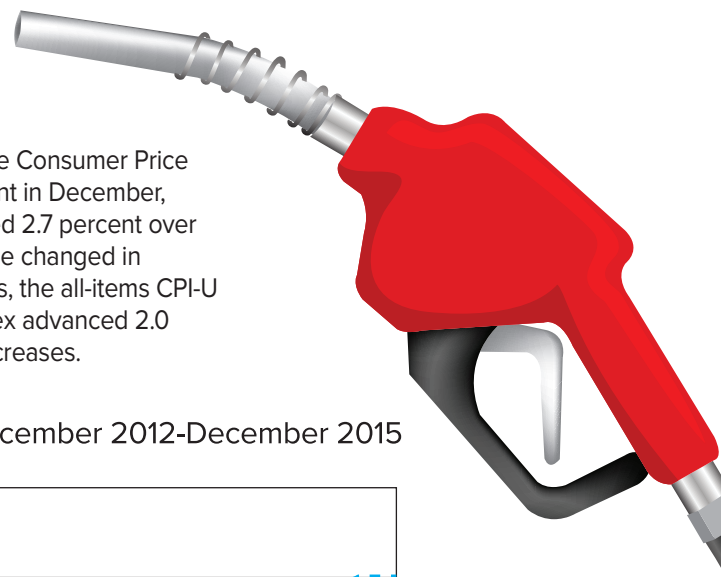
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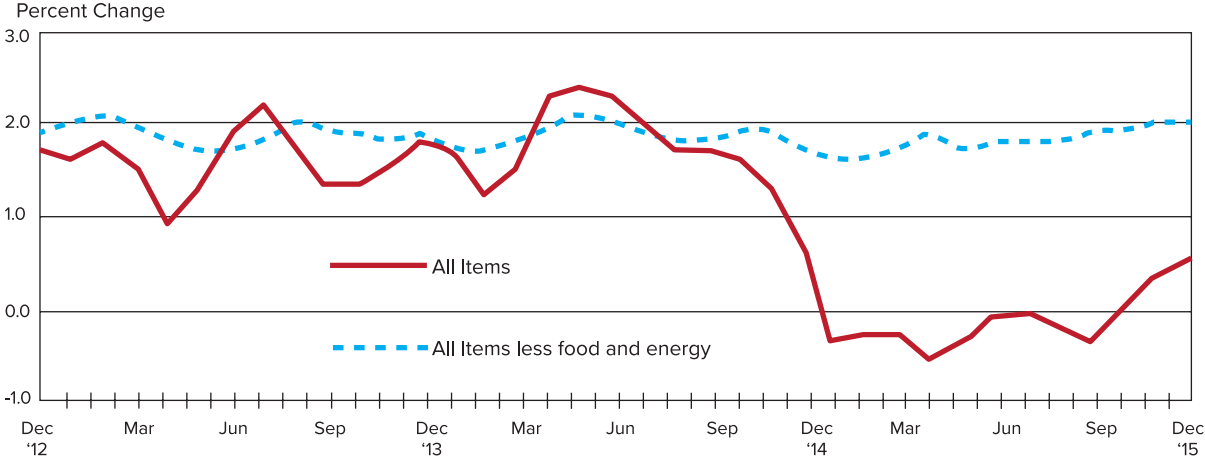
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Cheap gas puts the lid on inflation

Remarkably low energy prices are holding down inflation in the South. The Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) for the South decreased 0.4 percent in December, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The energy index declined 2.7 percent over the month. The all-items-less-food-and-energy, and food indexes were little changed in December, down 0.1 and 0.3 percent, respectively. Over the last 12 months, the all-items CPI-U rose 0.5 percent. At the same time the all items less food and energy index advanced 2.0 percent over the year as several categories within this group recorded increases.

Over-the-year percent change in CPI-U, South Region, December 2012-December 2015



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

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DEPARTMENTS

ON THE MOVE

Brandy Burnette has joined the Tennessee office of Hancock, Daniel, Johnson & Nagle, P.C. Burnette is an associate in the Johnson City office where she defends medical malpractice cases, and provides healthcare advice and representation in Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. She brings extensive civil litigation trial and appellate experience to HDJN.



Brandy Burnette

Burnette earned her undergraduate degree from Emory & Henry College and her law degree from the Cumberland School of Law in 2001. She is licensed in Tennessee and Alabama. In addition to having served as Secretary/Treasurer for the Greene County Bar Association, Brandy serves as president of the GFWC of Tennessee Greeneville Woman's Club.

Susan Zeiler has been named senior project manager for Corporate Marketing, a division of The Corporate Image, an integrated communications firm headquartered in Bristol, Tennessee.



Susan Zeiler

Zeiler, who has more than a decade of marketing, sales and project management experience, is responsible for assisting in the development and implementation of strategic marketing and advertising campaigns and projects for the company's clients.

"We are pleased to welcome Susan to the Corporate Marketing team," says Jon Lundberg, president and CEO of The Corporate Image. "Her extensive and proven experience in project and relationship management among a diverse customer base will be a strong asset for our clients."

Zeiler holds a master's degree in business administration from East Tennessee State University. She also received a bachelor's degree in business administration, with a concentration in marketing, from ETSU. Zeiler has served on boards and committees for several area organizations.

Zeiler resides in Bristol, Tennessee, with her family.

Gary Miller has been promoted to executive vice president and general counsel of Wellmont Health System.



Gary Miller

Miller has spent 14 years working with Wellmont's senior leadership team and the board of directors to ensure the health system successfully navigates the changing health care landscape and retains its leadership in the delivery of high-quality care. He is also playing an important role in the proposed merger of Wellmont with Mountain States Health Alliance.

Miller most recently served Wellmont as senior vice president for legal affairs and general counsel. He previously served as associate general counsel for Mission Health System in Asheville, N.C. Earlier in his legal career, Miller practiced health care, commercial and employment law as

part of several law firms.

In addition to practicing law, Miller was an adjunct professor teaching hospital and health care law at Appalachian State University. He also served as an assistant professor at Francis Marion University in Florence, S.C., where he taught business law and the legal environment of business. A former president of the Alliance of Tennessee Hospital Attorneys, Miller was chairman of the Tennessee Department of Health legislative task force that drafted the legislation that became the Tennessee Health Care Decisions Act. He also served on the Tennessee Hospital Association task forces on HIPAA compliance and unusual events reporting.

Miller graduated from the University of Virginia School of Law. He also holds a bachelor's degree in English education from Radford College and a master's degree in English from the University of Tennessee.

Daniel B. Snyder was appointed Acting Medical Center Director of the Mountain Home VA Healthcare System (MHVAHCS) Jan. 3 following the retirement of former director, Charlene Ehret.



Daniel Snyder

As Medical Center Director, Snyder has the overall responsibility for efficient management and operation of the general medical and surgical hospital with 114 medical, surgical, and psychiatric beds, a 120-bed community living center, a 150-bed domiciliary, an outpatient clinic

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in Knoxville, six community outpatient clinics and three rural outreach clinics. The James H. Quillen VA Medical Center at Mountain Home is a tertiary care, teaching hospital that provides a full range of patient care services with state of the art technology as well as education and research.

Snyder has a 34-year career with the Department of Veterans Affairs, having served the last three-and-a-half years as associate director at the Mountain Home VA Medical Center. Prior to that, he served in various management roles, including chief engineer; senior resident engineer; chief, IRM and chief, facilities management at different government facilities.

Snyder received a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from West Virginia University Institute of Technology and a Master of Business Administration from Middle Tennessee State University. Snyder is a member of the VA's Executive Career Field Development Class of 2010, American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) and is a VA certified mentor at the fellow level.

Chris Lawyer has been hired as communications manager for Bristol Motor Speedway (BMS) and Dragway. Lawyer has worked with numerous forms of sports including motorsports, tennis and college athletics during his rising career.



Chris Lawyer

Lawyer will lead public relations efforts for Bristol Dragway and the Bristol Chapter of Speedway Children's Charities. He also will assist in integrated strategy, development and execution for the Pilot Flying J Battle at Bristol as well as all Speedway and ancillary events. Lawyer comes to BMS following a two-year stint as media relations manager at the National Hot Rod Association. In addition, Lawyer has held positions with Michigan International Speedway, the NASCAR Hall of Fame and Ole Miss Athletics among others.

Lawyer is a graduate of the University of Mississippi.

Mullican Flooring has appointed **Kyle Evans** as plant manager for the company's Johnson City manufacturing facility.

Evans will manage and direct the plant operations of the 309,000-square-foot manufacturing facility, which includes production, milling and finishing. In addition to ensuring the safety of nearly 300 employees, Evans

will be responsible for optimizing production and verifying product quality.

"Kyle comes to Mullican with a wealth of knowledge and extensive experience in the hardwood flooring industry," says Neil Poland, president of Mullican Flooring. "His strong technical skills are matched by his enthusiasm for his work. We are pleased to have him serve in a leadership capacity at Mullican."

A Johnson City native, Evans holds a bachelor's degree in wood products from North Carolina State University in Raleigh, N.C., and a master's degree in business administration from East Tennessee State University. He has spent more than two decades working in the flooring industry, with significant experience in the area of research and development. Evans is also Six Sigma Green Belt certified.



Kyle Evans

Timothy K. Schools has joined Highlands Bankshares, Inc. and its wholly owned banking subsidiary, Highlands Union Bank (HUB) as president and chief executive officer to their boards, subject to regulatory approval. Schools comes to the Abingdon-based bank with more than 15 years of financial services experience, where he has been instrumental in the profitability, growth and risk management of several leading Southeastern banking institutions. He has held executive positions in the guidance and administration of financial services holding companies, including president, chief financial officer, and chief risk officer. His background includes significant profit-and-loss management, along with a broad array of audit, board, regulatory and Wall Street experience.

"We are delighted to introduce Mr. Schools as president and CEO, and warmly welcome him to Highlands Union Bank," says James D. Moore, Jr., M.D., chairman of HBI's and HUB's boards of directors. "He brings to HUB a wealth of knowledge and extensive experience in the financial services industry. We look forward to working with him to lead this institution into the future."

A native of Richmond, Va., Schools holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and a master's degree in business administration from Emory University in Atlanta, Ga.

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SEE ON THE MOVE, 26

DEPARTMENTS

ON THE MOVE, CONTINUED

Schools succeeds longtime Highlands Union Bank president and CEO Samuel L. Neese, who announced his retirement from the position last month.

Dr. Christopher J. “Joey” Gilbert has been named vice president of institutional advancement at Virginia Highlands Community College, where he began his duties Feb. 1.

Gilbert most recently served as director of development for medical programs at Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tenn. He holds a doctorate degree in educational leadership from the University of the Cumberlands, a master’s degree in business administration from LMU, a bachelor’s degree in business management from LMU, and an associate’s degree from Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College.

“We conducted a nationwide search for this important position to ensure we found a leader with the skills and experience needed to lead the VHCC Educational Foundation

and perform the other responsibilities of this job,” said President Gene C. Couch, Jr. “I’m confident Dr. Gilbert is the perfect choice, and I look forward to welcoming him to campus.”

Gilbert will serve as executive director of the VHCC Educational Foundation and a member of the president’s executive leadership team. His duties will include the administration of fund development, grants, community relations, alumni relations, major gift campaigns and special events.

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Wellmont Health Systems Executive Vice President and CFO **Alice Pope** has been recognized by *Becker’s Hospital Review* as one of the 130 women hospital and health system leaders to know for 2015. It is the fourth consecutive year *Becker’s* has selected Pope for this distinction.

In naming the list, *Becker’s* said it evaluated these executives for their management and leadership skills, as well as their career accomplishments. The publication

said the women have established themselves as successful leaders within the constantly evolving health care industry.

“Alice is an exceptional leader in our health system who has ensured we retain our solid financial standing during extraordinarily challenging times in the health care industry,” said Bart Hove, Wellmont’s president and CEO. “Through her efforts, Wellmont has been a model for the wise use of the financial resources to which we have been entrusted.”

Pope has about 20 years of experience in healthcare finance and has worked for Wellmont since 2000 in a number of roles with increasing responsibility. She has served as chief financial officer for more than three years and oversees about \$800 million in annual revenue.

During her tenure as the organization’s top financial leader, Pope has restructured



Alice Pope

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Wellmont's debt to lower the health system's interest rate to about 3 percent, which has reduced the expense for borrowed funds by \$2 million annually. With her assistance, Wellmont also revamped its revenue cycle operation through the use of its new electronic health record.

Another accomplishment was her leadership in the most recently completed fiscal year's results, which featured a 38 percent increase in operating income, 143 percent growth in net income and 6.4 percent increase in net patient service revenue.

"It is gratifying to receive this recognition from such a respected third-party source, as it reflects great work by so many professionals within Wellmont to be the low-cost, high-quality provider of choice in the region," Pope said. "Everyone is focused on examining our revenues and expenses to ensure we meet the needs of our patients efficiently and effectively. We have achieved extraordinary outcomes and will look for additional ways to elevate the quality of our health system."

Pope has a bachelor's degree in commerce, with a concentration in accounting, from the University of Virginia and a master's degree in business administration from East Tennessee State University.

Dr. James Shine, a clinical associate professor of family medicine at East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine, recently received the Rural Health Practitioner of the Year award from the Rural Health Association of Tennessee (RHAT).

Shine has been a family medicine physician in Mountain City for 20 years and serves as the lead physician working with ETSU Rural Primary Care Track medical students at Quillen. The award recognizes Shine's leadership in bringing health services to citizens of rural Tennessee.

In nominating Shine for the award, Dr. Joe Florence, professor and director of rural programs for Quillen's Department of Family Medicine, called Shine a leader in bringing health services to citizens of rural Tennessee.

"Dr. Shine has an approach to health care that responds not only to the needs of his individual patients and their families, but to the entire rural community," Florence said. "He demonstrates an exceptional understanding of the big picture – that the rural community is his patient and that improving the health of the rural community comes about through improving the system of care."

MED BRIEFS

New faculty join ETSU Med School's Department of Biomedical Sciences

Five new faculty members recently joined the Department of Biomedical Sciences at East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine.

The hirings mark a concerted effort by leaders to expand research efforts and maintain a strong teaching focus, according to Dr. Theo Hagg, chair of the department. "It is part of a longer-term plan that is expected to greatly enhance and expand the department's research efforts in the areas of neuroscience, cardiovascular disease, inflammation, cancer and genetics," he said. "These new faculty will also contribute greatly to the department's teaching programs for medical, physical therapy and graduate students and help to ensure the continuing excellent teaching at Quillen for decades to come."

The five new faculty members are:

- Dr. Patrick Bradshaw came to ETSU this fall from the University of South Florida where he served as an assistant professor in the Department of Cell Biology, Microbiology and Molecular Biology. Bradshaw, who grew up in Peoria, Ill., received his bachelor of science in bioengineering from the University of Illinois-Urbana and his Ph.D. in biochemistry from Ohio State University. He completed a postdoctoral fellowship from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His current research focus includes mechanisms of mitochondrial dysfunction in aging and neurodegenerative diseases.
- Dr. Russell Brown is formerly a professor in the Department of Psychology at ETSU. Brown, originally from Weatherford, Okla., received his bachelor of science in psychology and chemistry from the University of Oklahoma and his Ph.D. in experimental psychology from the University of Kentucky. He completed his postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Lethbridge in Canada. Brown's research focus is on substance abuse co-morbidity in behavioral disorders, sex differences in the response of psychostimulants and the consequences of drug treatment on neural plasticity.
- Dr. Diego Javier Rodriguez-Gil comes to ETSU from Yale University School of Medicine where he served as an associate

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DEPARTMENTS

MED BRIEFS, CONTINUED

research scientist in the Department of Neurosurgery. He received his Ph.D. from the School of Exact and Natural Sciences, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina. His research efforts are focused on understanding how neurons find their correct targets in the brain.


- Dr. Qian Xie came to ETSU from Grand Rapids, Mich., where she held positions as a research assistant professor and senior research scientist at Van Andel Research Institute. Xie received the equivalent of a medical degree from Shanghai Medical College of Fudan University in China. She completed her Ph.D. in clinical medicine with a major in oncology at the same university. Her postdoctoral fellowship training was completed at Van Andel Institute in the field of molecular oncology. Xie's research interests are in the field of molecular oncology and targeted therapy.
- Dr. Valentin Yakubenko joined the faculty at ETSU after growing his career



Dr. Patrick Bradshaw, Dr. Qian Xie, Dr. Diego Javier Rodriguez-Gil, Dr. Russell Brown, Dr. Valentin Yakubenko, with Dr. Theo Hagg, chair of the Department of Biomedical Sciences.

in the Lerner Research Institute at the Cleveland Clinic. Originally from Kiev, Ukraine, Yakubenko received his master of science in biophysics from the National Kiev University and a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the National Academy of Sciences in Ukraine. He has focused much of his career on structure-function analyses related to

chronic inflammation during cardiovascular and metabolic diseases.

The five new Quillen employees bring with them a combined \$1.35 million in new grant funding for ETSU related to their ongoing research projects. 

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Career Technical Education: Making a good thing better

By Jeff Keeling



By the time some of his peers are receiving their bachelor's degrees, Ethan Lyle is likely to be earning a pay packet in the mid-five figures – perhaps more if he's willing to travel. Many of those who took the four-year (or five, or six) route will be starting to think about student loan debt coming due. Lyle may be starting to think about a starter home.

I met Lyle late last month in Science Hill High School's career and technical education (CTE) area. He was polite, well-spoken, and patient with me as he explained the basics of TIG (tungsten inert gas) welding. By all accounts Lyle,

who does well academically and plays varsity basketball for the Hilltoppers, would be perfectly capable of pursuing a bachelor's himself. Instead, he's in the category of student that a good many of our political, academic and business leaders would love to see grow larger.

CTE is big these days. For the past several months, a task force with representatives from the Johnson City and Washington County, Tennessee schools, and the city and county elected bodies, has been discussing ways the school systems can best collaborate to benefit students from both systems. Those discussions have narrowed in, for the present, on CTE. In addition, the Washington County Economic Development Council has tasked a working group with a three-pronged study that all spins back to producing more career-ready young adults to bolster the region's future economically. CTE is making its way into that discussion as well.

It's likely similar discussions are occurring around the Greater Tri-Cities, as in fact they are across the country. Different counties and cities have varying levels of school system collaboration. The degree to which employers, technical schools, community colleges and four-year schools interface with pre-college CTE programs is sure to vary as well. And without a doubt, everyone wants to see all such programs improve and flourish.

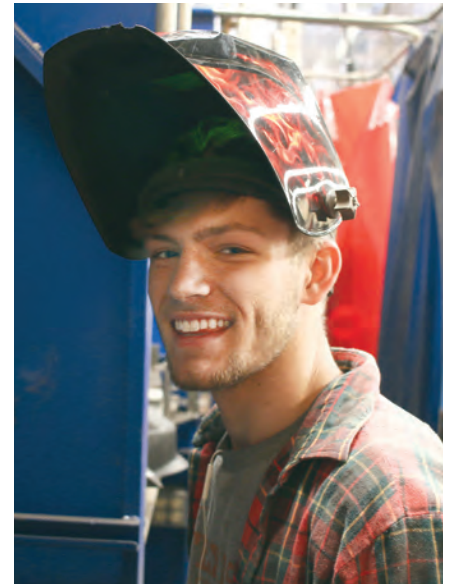
With that in mind, having listened to elected folk discuss the topic at multiple meetings, I decided to check on the state of CTE for myself. A couple of visits to Science Hill have given me sufficient grounding for several observations.

- If Johnson City's program is any indication, and I have no reason to suspect otherwise, the area's CTE leaders deserve a medal already. Science Hill offers courses in 11 of Tennessee's 16 "Career Cluster Focus Areas." They're taught by people who came to academics via the world of work, and who stay current with changes in their fields, director Julie Decker told me. Students don't just learn skills that will help them in work or college, they begin learning about real life – things like meeting budgets, and procuring equipment or material for their

programs only if they can figure out a way to produce the revenue to afford it.

- The CTE programs and their existing leaders need help, but not necessarily an overhaul. The CTE directors from around Northeast Tennessee already meet as members of the Northeast Tennessee Technical Education Association, which also includes representatives from area community colleges, Tennessee colleges of applied technology and the state department of education. They share ideas about dual credit opportunities, how they can collaborate, where they can share resources. As Decker put it, "we're a team of leaders who have a similar mission for our schools." Her teachers also communicate with employers in the fields for which their students are preparing – sometimes, by the way, fields they won't enter until after a bachelor's or beyond. So as the well-meaning elected and volunteer leaders concerned about workforce readiness focus in on CTE, I hope they approach their roles with open ears and minds, and strive to make a good thing better.
- All parents need to be open to CTE possibly being the best fit for their children. I fear too many parents of certain socio-economic backgrounds have a false notion that "vocational school" would be beneath their children, or be hard to explain to other parents in their circles. First of all, there are some honor student, post-graduate degree-bound kids in Science Hill's CTE programs – health science and digital art and design come to mind – who probably are getting a leg up on peers who aren't getting that exposure in high school. Second, some kids' aptitudes and desires run toward CTE. Just because you and your spouse have master's degrees and work white collar jobs doesn't mean your kid might not be happier as a mechanic. As Decker said, her hardest sell is when freshmen sign up for their high school academic track, because "everybody's going to Duke and Harvard."

It's good area leaders are focused on CTE. I hope they realize they already have a lot of positives with which to work, and that part of the task also involves changing parental perceptions. [B](#)



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