

# The Business Journal

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## Steve Johnson, Olan Jones inducted into JA Business Hall of Fame

**Special Section:  
Higher Education**

Photo by Jeff Sturgill

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PHOTO BY JEFF STURGILL



*Office*  
423.854.0140  
news@bjournal.com

*Publisher*  
William R. Derby  
bderby@bjournal.com  
423.979.1300

*Co-Publisher*  
Jeff Derby  
jderby@bjournal.com  
423.306.0104

*Managing Editor*  
Scott Robertson  
srobertson@bjournal.com  
423.767.4904

*Marketing Coordinators*  
Maggie Cooper  
mcooper@bjournal.com  
423.863.0750

Richard G. Preston  
rgpreston@bjournal.com  
423.262.7760

Robin Williams  
rwilliams@bjournal.com  
423.794.6938

*Creative*  
Derby Publishing, LLC  
Graphics Director / Judd Shaw  
jshaw@bjournal.com  
423.833.2726



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# WHY CHOOSE A CORPORATE TRUSTEE?

## EXPERTISE & SPECIALIZATION

With corporate trusteeship, multiple individual people are working as trustee. The result is that with one corporate trustee, each trust sees the benefit of expertise in many areas (legal, investing, accounting & recordkeeping, operations, etc.) which no individual, no matter how talented, could fully replicate.

## CONTINUITY

For any trust, but especially with respect to Dynasty Trusts, an entity as trustee ensures continuity of the trustee function. Any individual, even if young, could vacate the office due to death or incapacity on any given day. Corporate entity systems and processes in place for safeguarding will continue to perform its duties into the future, regardless of the health of any particular individual.

## OVERSIGHT

A professional trustee has an outside, disinterested regulator assisting the beneficiaries with the job of ensuring that the trustee does the right thing. In order to stay in business, the corporate trustee must conduct its affairs to the satisfaction of these independent regulators, who are placed in their role by the government for the protection of the public.

## LIABILITY

If something does go wrong, a corporate trustee is bonded and insured for the protection of the beneficiaries.

## ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

A corporate trustee, in business to profit from trust administration, has an economic incentive to 1) avoid liability by following the trust document and applicable law and 2) provide excellent services—the trustmakers and beneficiaries of its trusts.

## FAMILY DYNAMICS & OBJECTIVITY

A corporate trustee is removed from sibling rivalries and/or other family undercurrents and is positioned to evaluate things more objectively than a family member. Thus, possible conflicts of interest and the roles of emotion or personal agendas in decision-making is minimized.

## REPORTING & TRANSPARENCY

A corporate trustee will be diligent to ensure that proper trust records are kept, and that all relevant parties (beneficiaries, trustmakers, trust directors or protectors, tax preparers, etc.) receive the information to which they are entitled related to the administration of the trust.

## AVAILABILITY

A corporate trustee is organized and structured to perform trust administration. An individual trustee likely has his or her own professional and personal obligations. Use of a corporate trustee allows those would-be family-member trustees to pursue their own interests free from the obligations and duties of trust administration.



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## And get off my lawn!



If you read this column and believe I've written it because I'm a cranky old man who doesn't get social media, you're wrong. I am a cranky old man who doesn't get social media, but I wrote this column because things like recidivism, poverty, addiction and how to regrow a troubled economy matter more than whether anyone who follows you remembers "I love college" by Asher Roth.

You see, I heard from the College of

Communications inside the stately walls of old UT as we were putting together this issue. The folks there were interested in advertising in our higher education special section. For a brief time I was tempted to include an article, out of sheerest loyalty to my alma mater.

I agreed, in fact, to accept a submission from Karli Sanders, UT College of Communication and Information Marketing and Communication Specialist with whom I somehow only share two common connections on LinkedIn.

I asked what a college that not that long ago taught print, radio(!) and television journalism is teaching students in the age of social media.

"The College of Communication & Information in Knoxville is one of the only university facilities in the world to house an established command center (ed. Note: A command center. How exciting! I was taught by that very college to eschew jargon. Goodness, how white my beard is getting.) with full access to Salesforce's Social Studio for students, faculty and staff to utilize for teaching and research opportunities," wrote Ms. Sanders, who will never live down the fact that she saw Big Time Rush in concert\*. "The use of Salesforce Marketing Cloud technology provides the College's students and faculty with access to the same leading technology that Fortune 100 companies worldwide use to publish, engage and analyze their social media marketing activities. The Adam Brown Social Media Command Center has transformed how students conduct research for their classes. One example of this is a social media strategy course for Advertising and Public Relations students. Participants in the class work in groups to create social media

strategies and campaigns for real clients such as Dollywood and the Atlanta Braves."

All snark aside, that sounds pretty impressive. I do, however, wonder if one really needs to invest in a student loan to learn to handle a more-active-than-usual client's social media duties.

So aside from what you've just read, I'll just tip my hat to other, more practical programs at UT (Industrial Services or Ag Extension anyone?) and concentrate on schools farther east.

You see, I have a gut feeling that practically anyone who would attend a university to study social media skills is in less need of formal education than other types of learning. Students who wish to return to school to learn a trade, however, have my respect almost immediately. They are more likely, I would posit, to make a difference in the economy of their home community than a command center full of social media mavens.

Why? An individual who seeks a certificate in welding from a Tennessee College of Applied Technology or community college is much more likely to be returning to workforce participation than a public relations exec in his or her second or third job.

That means not only is that individual improving his or her lot in life, he or she is also positively affecting the overall per capita income and thus the poverty rate.

Don't think that's a big deal? Mac Holladay, CEO of Market Street Services, an economic development consulting firm, explains it well: "the labor force participation rate tells us the percentage of those 18 to 65 not in the military, incarcerated, or full-time students who are at work or actively looking for work. The U.S. average is 63%. Currently, there are approximately 253K working age adults in this region. The latest data tells us that the LFPR in the area is only 54.2%. That means that 136K are in the workforce, and 117K are NOT. If the area had the U.S. average LFPR, the number of workers would be 159K. So basically, there are 47,000 MISSING workers in the MSA. It should also be noted that having that many people out of the workforce negatively affects the overall per capita income and raises the poverty rate."

So, social media students, have fun and do well. I hope you all have brilliant careers as influencers and that you make more money than Dolly Parton and all the Atlanta Braves combined. But God bless the returning worker and the institutions that make that return possible.

\*I saw Rush in concert. Does that count? Probably not.

# Junior Achievement 2019 Hall of Fame Gala



Mitch Cox, Roy Harmon, David Wagner



Phyllis Tunnell, John and Lynne Hope, Terry Hull Crawford, Kent Bewley, Bob and Carolyn Isaacs



Scott Jeffress, Brian Noland and Dan Mahoney



Dr. Jerry and Emma Lee Miller



Steve Darden, Julie and Chad Wallace



Patty and Gene Davis and Lee and Michelle Clark



Liza Harmon, Judy Maness, Laura Levine, and Donna Noland

# April pending home sales up for the 20th straight month

April's new approved contracts for existing home sales were barely better than March, but it was enough to set another record, according to the Northeast Tennessee Association of Realtors (NETAR).

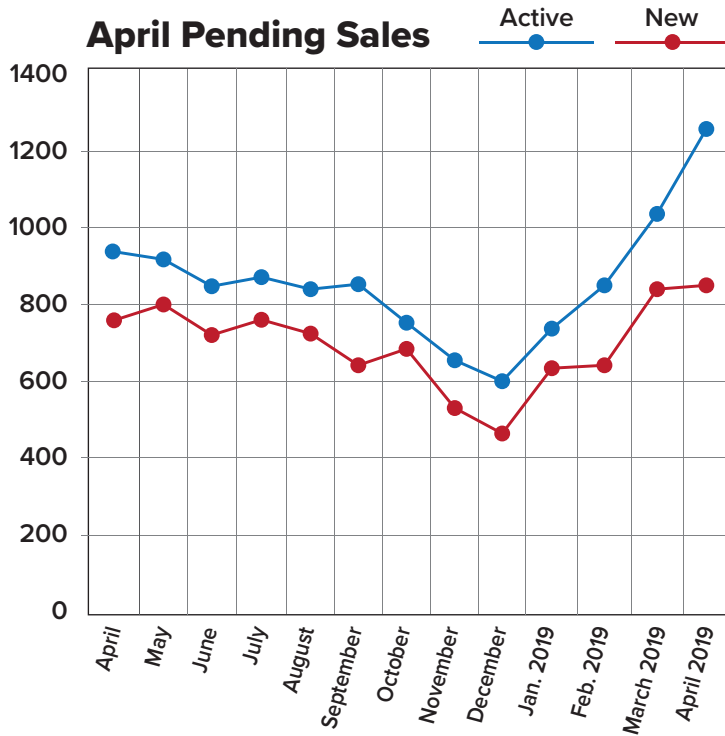
There were 854 new approved contracts in April – up five from March. The preliminary total for all active, pending sales increased to 1,240 – up 210 from March. Both are records, according to Realtor Property Resource (RPR) reports.

Pending sales are forward-looking indicators based on new contract signings. “Mortgage rates were down for the third straight week thru May 16, and mortgage applications are up,” NETAR President Karen Randolph said. “The lower rates are doing two things: giving buyers extra incentive to

lock in at the lower rate and reducing the total monthly mortgage payment. These incentives are balancing some of the pressure higher prices have put on affordability.”

The average 30-year fixed rate was 4.07 percent for the week ending May 18. The new pending sales trend has been positive for 20 months. In April the moving average was 9.2 percent better than April last year.

A home sale is listed as pending when a contract has been signed, but the transaction has not closed. Pending sales usually move to closings in 30 to 45 days. Not all contracts in the pipeline will move to closing. It is normal for as many as 5 percent to fall through and the fall-through rate has been higher recently due to the number of contingency contracts.



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# ebm-papst to locate manufacturing plant in Washington County, Tenn.

by Scott Robertson



The ebm-papst site at the Washington County Industrial Park, Telford.

A Germany-based electric motor and fan manufacturing company will begin operations at a temporary site in Johnson City in a few weeks before building its own plant in the Washington County Industrial Park. ebm-papst U.S. President Mark Shiring was joined by Tennessee Commissioner of Economic and Community Development Bobby Rolfe in making the announcement at the industrial park last month.

“I can only say that we are excited to be here. This has been a project we have been working on for over a year,” Shiring told a crowd of around 100 at the industrial park. “We’re happy to finally select Johnson City/Washington County, Tenn., as our second U.S. manufacturing site.”

In formally announcing the decision, Rolfe said, “It’s my privilege to announce that ebm-papst will invest \$37 million of private capital in the ground right behind us, will be creating 200 great jobs, and will be building a manufacturing plant – actually their second manufacturing plant in the U.S. – all right here in Washington County.”

Production will begin in late summer or early fall at the leased Johnson City facility, and expand from there. The company plans to have 68 employees in place by the end of 2019, and 179 employees within five years.

ebm-papst is a second-generation privately held company with about \$2 billion in revenue. The company employs around

15,000 people worldwide.

ebm-papst has customers in several diverse industries, Shiring told the crowd. “We supply into ventilation, air conditioning, heating, appliances, transportation, medical and industrial. We are part of the equipment that cools buildings, that cools homes, that cools data centers – refrigeration equipment for grocery stores – we cool transit buses – we provide cooling for greenhouses and livestock. We provide precision cooling for medical equipment, motors for conveyors and inter-logistics equipment in warehouses – if there’s motion or movement, then you’ll find ebm-papst fans inside.”

Though based in Germany, the firm has what Shiring referred to as a local-for-local strategy. “We want to build products in the U.S. that are consumed in North America.” The company’s U.S. operations are based in Farmington, Conn. “We have a long history there with 300 employees that’s not going away,” Shiring said. “We are growing and we need to expand our production footprint to meet that local-for-local strategy. That’s why we’ve come to Johnson City.”

Another key factor in the ebm-papst’s decision to locate in Washington County was the workforce, Shiring said. “East Tennessee State University and the TCAT schools provide local education and a great talent pool to support our business, and we were impressed by the investment in education here and how the

TCAT program here can integrate with our specific skill requirements.”

“The community here is the right size for us,” Shiring added, noting that the international headquarters is in a small town about 90 minutes from Frankfurt in Germany, and that Farmington is similar in size to Johnson City. “We want to be an important part of this community and a positive corporate citizen. ebm-papst is still located and thriving in this small town of Mulfingen in Germany, where our founder started the company over 50

years ago. We’ve been in Farmington for over 30 years, since we started in the U.S. When we start in a community, we plan to be there for a very long time. So, it is with that very careful and methodical evaluation we select Johnson City to grow into the future and be here for a very long time.”

“This location has a good proximity to our customer base,” Shiring said. “It provides good access to transportation.” The ebm-papst site is close to the AO Smith manufacturing facility in Johnson City. AO Smith is an ebm-papst customer. “ebm-papst has a local-for-local strategy,” Shiring said. “What this means is we want to build products in the U.S. that are consumed in North America. We have been on that strategic path for several years, and this is why Johnson City is part of that expansion to grow.”

The announcement continues a strong relationship between the state’s economic development community and the German business community. The ebm-papst announcement marks the 121st German company to locate operations in Tennessee, Rolfe said. That pipeline has created more than 20,000 jobs for Tennesseans. “Companies across Germany have invested more than \$5 billion in private capital in Tennessee,” Rolfe said.

Shiring said quality of place played a role in determining where ebm-papst would locate its new manufacturing facility. He told the crowd that members of his management team had made “secret shopper” trips to the region without letting anyone in Northeast Tennessee know they would be here, and that those trips solidified the idea that the community was welcoming, enthusiastic and a good potential home. “The community was very welcoming to our team and the interest was very high in our project. There’s a very positive feeling that we have experienced



(L-R) Allen Borden, Bobby Rolfe, Joe Grandy, Alicia Summers, Joe Wise, Mark Shiring, Michael Wackenhut, Mitch Miller. PHOTOS COURTESY NETREP



Mark Shiring, ebm-papst U.S. president

already.” Rolfe agreed with the assessment, adding, “When I look at the backdrop and I look at this community, I know why this new company has chosen to call Northeast Tennessee home.

“At the end of the day, it’s the company that falls in love with the local community,” Rolfe added. “That works vice versa. This is a company that has searched the U.S. in a very competitive process, looked at multiple states, multiple sites in Tennessee, and at the end of the day picked this community. We’re very

excited about this.”

“This has been a long process,” added Washington County Mayor Joe Grandy, “It’s been over a year in the making. We have had the opportunity to work with a group of great folks in the site selection organization (ebm-papst) chose and the folks that helped put the deal together. Our group at NeTREP, Mitch and Alicia have really come together and worked hard looking at a lot of different scenarios to bring this fine company into our community. We feel like it’s a great fit, and for a lot of reasons. This process was done in a way that would benefit everyone, and everyone came together to do it. We are thrilled by ebm-papst’s decision to locate its manufacturing operations in the Washington County Industrial Park and I thank the Washington County Commission for their foresight in supporting the efforts to bring ebm-papst to Washington County.”

Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership CEO Mitch Miller credited Alicia Summers, vice president of business development, for running point on NeTREP’s effort to recruit ebm-papst. Washington County competed with a community in Texas for the project. The ebm-papst announcement represents the largest single capital investment in Washington County since 2011.

The company received incentives from both Washington County and the state of Tennessee. Rolfe said, “I want to thank ebm-papst for choosing to locate its new operations in Washington County and for boosting our foreign direct investment initiatives in our state by creating 200 jobs in the Northeast region.”

“We want to be an important part of this community and a solid corporate citizen,” Shiring said. “This is a very beautiful part of the country which myself, my family and my team look forward to enjoying very, very soon.”

# Merj begins large-scale industrial hemp cultivation and processing in Northeast Tennessee

by Scott Robertson



A transformation is taking place in northeast Tennessee, one that could propel the region to being recognized as the hub of hemp production for the Southeast and beyond.

For many years, Merj family farmland in Sullivan County supported stocks of cattle and crops of corn and alfalfa. Now, following passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, which provided for industrial hemp cultivation, the first of many *Cannabis sativa* seedlings are going into the ground.

Merj is a vertically integrated company focused on the production of high-quality, full-spectrum cannabinoid (commonly known as CBD) products derived from hemp. Established in 2018, the Bristol, Tenn.-based company is taking advantage of surging interest in the plant, which has attracted the attention of medical researchers and entrepreneurs for its potential range of therapeutic effects.

Hemp is also under the eye of investors, with deals valued in the hundreds of millions taking place on a near-weekly basis. Major financial institutions predict the market to grow exponentially as premier companies such as CVS, Walgreens, PepsiCo, Walmart and Target are either already stocking CBD-based items on the shelf or exploring the integration of CBD into product lines.

“The 2018 Farm Bill triggered a fundamental shift in the way America does business, on the kind of scale you see maybe once in a generation,” said Russell Leonard, founder of Merj. “This is a very exciting time, one that’s bringing a sense of hope to people who are looking for products that can help soothe and balance their lives. It’s also creating a new sense of purpose for those in the agriculture industry, and providing our region a unique



RUSSELL LEONARD, WHO FOUNDED MERJ, OVERSEES THE PLANTING OF THE FIRST 10-ACRE TRACT OF LAND



LEONARD WITH HOWARD BROADFOOT AT THE MERJ FARM

opportunity to play a central role in this emerging market.”

Merj is one of the larger hemp growers in Tennessee, with resources that include nearly 200 acres of licensed grow space in Sullivan County — as well as a new, 18,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art processing facility designed to process biomass, extract CBD compounds, and test the finished product for purity and potency.

Hemp contains a complex mix of compounds, including phytocannabinoids and terpenes, that seem to interact with the human nervous system on the molecular level. In particular, medical researchers are

studying how these compounds influence the endocannabinoid system, a network of receptors in the body that help regulate pain, inflammation, mood, mobility and more.

Hemp lacks the psychoactive compound known as THC that produces a sense of euphoria. Because industrial hemp contains less than .3 percent THC, it is legal for sale and use throughout the U.S. and dozens of countries worldwide.

“It’s not yet fully known how the dozens and dozens of compounds found in hemp interact with our nervous systems, so we’ve invested in extraction processes that help preserve full-spectrum integrity of our

products,” Leonard said. “We want to make sure that all the goodness in these mountains goes into what we provide our customers.”

In addition to processing its own biomass, Merj plans to offer extraction and testing services for other industrial hemp farmers.

“We feel very fortunate to have decades of farming knowledge and business ingenuity backing this operation,” Leonard said. “We’re well positioned to enter and compete in this market, which I believe will have transformational effects on our region’s identity and success.”

## Hemp Facts

- Hemp (*Cannabis sativa*) is an environmentally friendly plant. Crops help control soil erosion and air pollution, offer a natural form of weed control and provide wildlife habitat. Because it is cultivated without pesticides, hemp also cuts down on the use of chemicals on farmland.
- Depending on the variety, 1 acre of farmland can host between 1,000 - 1,500 hemp plants.
- 1 plant = approximately 1 pound of hemp biomass.
- Hemp contains dozens of compounds known as cannabinoids (CBD) and terpenes that seem naturally designed to interact with the human nervous system.
- The majority of CBD yield comes from the flower of a plant. Because of this, all-female stands of hemp are planted. Crops must be monitored for males to prevent pollination. Plants that pollinate and go to seed have a significantly reduced CBD yield and potency.
- CBD compounds are being researched for a number of potential health applications, including relief from pain, inflammation and anxiety.
- Nearly every part of the hemp plant can be used, and major applications exist in the health care, textile, beauty and wellness markets.
- Major retailers, including CVS and Walgreens, have already committed to stocking CBD-based products on the shelves. Other top-list companies, including Walmart, Target, Safeway and more, are exploring CBD-based products.
- Unlike marijuana (*Cannabis indica*), hemp does not contain significant amounts of the psychoactive compound THC. Hemp-derived CBD products containing less than .3% THC are legal for sale and use throughout the U.S. and dozens of additional countries.



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# NN Inc will pay taxes owed despite departure

**N**NN Inc. will pay 67 percent of 2019 property taxes due on its former headquarters in north Johnson City – rather than zero – after falling 107 jobs short of a tax incentive-related requirement. That will amount to approximately \$113,000 and includes assessments on real estate and personal property.

The company recently announced it would eliminate its remaining Johnson City corporate workforce by July. NN submitted its Annual Performance Report to the City’s Industrial Development Board (IDB) late Thursday, which indicated 63 employees remained at the Johnson City location as of March 9.


“NN had added 72 jobs when they chose to relocate in 2018,” Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership CEO Mitch Miller said. “Our preference certainly would have been for NN to remain in Johnson City and create the 200 jobs they projected back in 2014, but the protection in the PILOT put forth by the IDB is the reason we will see the property taxes paid this year.”

In 2017, partly in response to “general concerns about PILOTs,” the Tennessee General Assembly directed

Tennessee’s Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations to complete a study of PILOT agreements, including what the economic benefits to counties and cities are from the use of PILOT agreements.

The study found “it is not uncommon for PILOT agreements to be reevaluated because a (company) is missing jobs, wages, or investment projections,” the study found. As in NN’s case, penalties are “forward looking,” allowing IDBs to reduce, restructure or eliminate only future promised incentives. NN’s PILOT has been in effect since the 2015 tax year, but 2019 is the first year the performance report affects NN’s local tax liability.

Miller said PILOT agreements are a necessary and widely used tool in the competitive landscape of job recruitment and retention. Some recipients don’t perform, making the agreements’ structure important to protect the affected communities.

The IDB and local governments continue to refine the local PILOT program. “We want to use PILOT agreements selectively, when they make sense based on a thorough vetting of all the factors,” Miller said. 

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# Business Hall of Fame

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Steve Johnson and Olan Jones



# 2019 Business Hall of Fame Laureate

## Steve Johnson

When you're a six-foot-six former NFL tight end with a booming voice and a flair for the dramatic, you get used to hearing the word "big." Steve Johnson, principal of Johnson Commercial Development in Bristol, Virginia, embraces the idea of not just being a physically big man, but of going big in virtually everything he does, from professional ambitions to civic generosity.

Former Contura Energy CEO Kevin Crutchfield, a longtime friend and client, puts it this way. "He's obviously a large guy, but he has a very large brain and a very large heart to match. He's got a big personality. Obviously, he likes to do things in a big way but he does things the right way, treats people well. I think most of all, he's got a big heart. He does a lot of good things that most people don't even really know about. I find that part of him quite fascinating but he's an absolute blast to spend time with, too. There's never a dull moment with Steve around."

BurWil Construction President Bill Prince agrees. "Steve is a big guy and he lives a big life and Steve elevates me – elevates everybody around him – to his persona. He is a go-getter 100 percent of the time."

Emmitt Smith, like Johnson, a former NFL player who's made the transition to commercial real estate development, describes Johnson like this: "Big personality, big spirit, big heart, give back to the community. Obviously loves what he does, what he's doing, and he's just a very passionate person about life and a very passionate person about people. He's a people person. When you meet Steve Johnson, you know you met someone very significant because the stories that he would tell, the way he would make you feel when he's in your presence. He's just that kind of dude."

And Brad Adams, Johnson Commercial Development vice president, says, "I think when Steve walks into a room people tend to pay attention to what he's saying. He seems to have that natural ability to get a captive audience."

Much has been made over the years about Steve Johnson's outsized personality. Those who've met him socially know the good ol' boy with the ready smile and the deep Alabama drawl. Those who've done business with him know the detail-minded executive with a sharp mind for figures.

But there's more to Steve Johnson than that. There's also the generous spirit who gave \$1 million to the United Way of Bristol, who has donated in the seven figures to his alma mater, Virginia Tech, who helped bring dozens of nationally known professional athletes and coaches to Niswonger Children's Hospital golf tournaments, and who shows his generosity in ways that will

never be captured by the news media. There's also the intense competitor who's loathe to back down from a challenge. There's the mischievous prankster who loves to entertain himself and those around him. And there's the friend who's loyal to a fault.

Perhaps, then, the most important quality Steve possesses is discernment, a trait he began to cultivate as a boy in north Alabama. "Huntsville, Alabama was mostly responsible for putting man on the moon and Marshall Space Flight Center and the Redstone Arsenal, Wernher von Braun and all those components led to Huntsville, Alabama being essentially the brains for us for modules going to the moon," Johnson remembers. "That's the good news. The bad news was that I had to go to school with all of the smartest people in the world's kids. I realized early on that academics wasn't necessarily going to be my thing, that I better find something else to be really good at. So that's when I focused on sports."

Growing up in rural Alabama, Johnson found he excelled at most sports. He played baseball and ran track, sometimes on the same day, wearing his baseball uniform on the track before heading down to the ballfield. He was an All-State high school athlete in both basketball and football when he had another opportunity for discernment. During his senior year, Johnson took a recruiting visit to Blacksburg to talk with Virginia Tech football coach Bill Dooley. Steve was planning to thank Dooley for his time but choose to pursue a collegiate basketball career. Instead, Dooley changed Johnson's world.

"He said, 'You know, you're 6'6" and there just aren't a lot of really good 6'6" guys in the NBA playing forward, so I really think you could be a great football player. I think you can be a better football player. You might be better at basketball now but football's your future. In fact, I think you have the attributes to play at the next level.'"

"I had never heard that before," Johnson says. "I'd never even dreamed that or thought that and I was kind of surprised at that. But it was the way he said it, it was the inflection in his voice and fortunately it was like the first really good gut call I ever made where I on the spot said, 'Okay, I'm with you.'"

Playing football at the major college level taught Johnson lessons he'd never forget, though some of those lessons were pretty tough. Virginia Tech's offense required him to do a good deal of run-blocking. That might not have been so bad, had it not been for whom he had to block. Across the line of scrimmage in most every practice was future NFL Hall of Fame defensive end Bruce



Smith. If you ask Johnson now how his first year in Blacksburg went, he simply says, “I survived.”

Johnson did more than survive during the next four years at Virginia Tech. He proved Bill Dooley right. He did have what it took to play at the next level. The National Football League’s New England Patriots made him the 154th player taken overall in the 1988 NFL draft. Johnson was one of eight tight ends who the Patriots had in camp before the 1988 season, including multiple-time All-Pro Russ Francis. The team would keep only three of them. Johnson knew the competition would be tight, but again, it taught him a lesson that would help him later in life.

“Whatever you did yesterday didn’t matter,” Johnson explains. “It’s a new day. That just really stressed on me the importance of getting it done on a consistent basis. There are days, some of those guys they’d have a great day, it’s like, “How’s this guy not make this team?” but maybe he has a day or two that’s bad and next thing you know, he’s gone. But that solid, consistent, day-in-day-out guy – they just know that that’s their guy.”

Johnson played with the Patriots and Dallas Cowboys before suffering a career-ending knee injury against the Houston Texans. Knowing he’d have to heal before continuing his life, whether in the NFL or not, Johnson retreated with his then-wife Kim to Bristol, where her parents lived. Her father, coal executive Don Nicewonder, took Steve under his wing and the two had soon hatched a commercial real estate project.

“I was still rehabbing my knee and Don was busy in the coal mines, so we hatched this crazy plan one night,” Johnson says. “We were going to build a golf course. And I was going to make it happen. The next thing you know we hire Tom Fazio, the golf course architect, and hire a golf course contractor and literally before you know it, like in 90 days, we were under construction. We had no idea what we’re doing, but we were gonna figure it out. And then just like that, within, wow, maybe 15, 16 months, that thing was done.”

That thing, as Johnson calls it, was The Virginian, a private golf residential community. Johnson and Nicewonder began marketing home sites to buyers who traditionally had bought in the mountains of western North Carolina. Those buyers loved most of the features of the Virginian itself, Steve says, but they had some important questions.

“They started asking, ‘Where do you shop? Where do you eat? Where do you go to the movies?’ and I’m like, ‘Oh gosh. Here we go,’” Johnson says. “So, that’s where the idea of commercial real estate came along. I went nearby to Exit 7 and just started developing real estate. Not really because I wanted to get into that, but to remove the negative from the golf residential project. Once I got into that I accidentally realized what my love and passion was and I’ve just been doing it ever since.”

One thing Johnson’s sporting background had taught him was that he would never get anywhere without a solid group of professionals around him. “Once you have your property and your vision and it’s time to execute, you’ve got to have the team around you to assist in making that happen. There are so many aspects that go into what I do, whether it be acquisition, leasing, financing, the legal aspect, engineering, marketing, you’ve got to wear so many hats. I am so thankful to have on my team and as part of my peripheral team, some fantastic team members that



Johnson with former coach Frank Beamer.

can help pull all this together. Without them, we wouldn’t be anywhere, especially as we’ve moved onto the bigger projects.”

When building the team that would become the basis for Johnson Commercial Development, Johnson utilized some core concepts from his sporting background. Everyone on the team would know the goals of the company, and everyone would know his or her role in that pursuit. Everyone would be expected to be accountable for delivery of the agreed-upon level of production, and no one would stop working, fighting, scratching and clawing until the goals had been achieved. Johnson modeled his own role on the coaches he’d come to admire.

“Our CEO is a coach,” Johnson says, “and the one thing especially in college and professional that was common among our coaches was that they always had a great strategy and they knew how to impart that upon us. Their level of preparedness was unbelievable. I remember being blown away at the level of detail and the level of their preparation as we forced any opponent, and by their ability to impart that upon us to get us to execute, the way they communicated it and how they wanted us to execute.

“Maybe the most important thing from the CEOs, coaches, leaders of these teams is they had this unbelievable situational awareness about them that just at the right time they knew what to do or what to say and I just have to believe that that sense of strategy and preparation and ability to teach execution prepared them to have that level of situational awareness.

Finally, Johnson says, he started from day one to create a sound culture, again modeled after the best organizations with which he’d had experience in sports. “Everything had just seemed so solid from top to bottom, organizationally there just wasn’t a weak point. And the plan always seemed so realistic, you could buy into it, it wasn’t farfetched, it wasn’t underwhelming, it was realistic and solid.

One of the earliest business partnerships Johnson Commercial Development made was BurWil Construction, which won the bid

to build the Tinseltown movie theater at Exit 7. Bill Prince, president of BurWil recalls being struck from the beginning by Johnson's drive to excel.

"Steve has always wanted to do everything right," Prince says. "Steve wants to build quality facilities. He wants to know that he does things the way it's supposed to be done for himself, for the community, for everything associated with him. So Steve makes everybody that works with him better."

BurWil and Johnson Commercial Development have done business together ever since. They collaborated on the Alpha Natural Resources headquarters building off Exit 7. What's less well-known is that Johnson also was involved with building the previous Alpha headquarters off Exit 14. Then-Alpha CEO Kevin Crutchfield had first met Johnson at Virginia Tech when both were students. But it was Johnson's drive to excel, not their old-school-chum relationship that won Steve the job, Crutchfield says.

"Well, as he got into commercial development and as our company began to grow ... We started out in a small office on Main Street in Abingdon. As we grew, we were popping at the seams and had little offices all over town. I don't know how it came to pass but we just started talking one night about the need for a bigger building designed for our purpose. He built us our first building there in Abingdon, did a great job on it."

So, when it came time for Alpha to move into a larger building, working with Johnson was the obvious choice, Crutchfield says. "It was a big project, 130,000 square-foot building, highly complicated. He didn't do what he told us he was going to do. He did better. He built it faster than he said he was going to build it. He built it cheaper than he said he was going to build it and he built it better than he said he was going to build it."

The Alpha building was a big project. But, Johnson's biggest project in this region was still to come. The Pinnacle, a massive retail development Johnson began developing in 2013 at the Tennessee/Virginia border placed him squarely in the regional spotlight. It has been a transformative development for the region.

"The Pinnacle as we know it today in Bristol, Tennessee has been tremendous," Johnson says. "It has created 2,000 jobs. Last year we had six million visitors and did almost 200 million in sales, so it's been fantastic."

When Johnson purchased the property that would become the Pinnacle on the Tennessee side of the state line, he also purchased a similar-sized parcel on the Virginia side. In February of this year, he announced his plans for developing that land, comparing its potential favorably to the Tennessee Pinnacle development.



Lexi Johnson, Nicki Smith, Steve Johnson, Steven Johnson

"I think it can have as big an impact or bigger," Johnson says. "I believe that the idea of an outdoor amphitheater where you have a multi-genre venue to enjoy music with up to 15,000 people can be extraordinary. I think that an adventure park similar to some things that you see at some of the larger parks in America will be really cool. I believe this indoor hotel waterpark is spot-on, especially with our access to interstate 81 and the location of similar competitors."

The plans for the Virginia Pinnacle development are ambitious, as one would expect. They are, in a word, big. Yet those who know Steve Johnson best harbor no doubt he'll do everything he says.

"Steve does what he says he's going to do," Crutchfield

says. "You don't need a contract. You have them, but if he tells you he's going to do something, he's going to do it."

Johnson's former coach at Virginia Tech, Frank Beamer says, "You like being around people with integrity. You can trust them. You know they're telling you the truth – and that's Steve. You like being around Steve and I think it goes back to high integrity."

Integrity, a quality Steve says he learned from his late father, is what Johnson says he has tried hardest to instill as a value in his own children - Paulena, Lexi and Steven.

If they look to their own father for a role model, says Emmitt Smith -- who followed Steve's lead in transitioning from a career in the NFL to a career in commercial real estate development -- Johnson's kids will have a leg up on success in life.

"As a person I would just say what you need to emulate about Steve Johnson is his spirit, his demeanor, and his love for life and others. He's always embracing and always willing to bring others into his circle. But most importantly, personally, his perseverance. Life is going to deal you some things that you're gonna have to learn how to overcome. And you have to have that fortitude or that will to continue to push forward. It's never gonna be easy, even though people like Steve Johnson and some people like to think I make it look easy. But it's not easy. There's a part of you that's constantly being taken away every day because you're so busy focusing on certain things. And sometimes you miss some of the smaller things. But that's okay. You have to stay hungry, you have to stay self-motivated, and you also have to learn how to encourage others because you cannot become successful by yourself. Steve understands that."

Adds Crutchfield, "Steve thinks big and he's very thoughtful. He takes appropriate risks but they're calculated risks. It's hard to say what he might do next but I virtually guarantee you if he's going to put his fingerprint on it, it's going to do really, really well." ▲

# 2019 Business Hall of Fame Laureate Olan Jones

If you ask people who know Eastman Credit Union (ECU) CEO Olan Jones about his character, both as a man and as a businessman, you're likely to get very similar responses.

"Olan is a phenomenal leader," says ECU Chairman of the Board Fielding Rolston. "He's got all the characteristics that you would expect to find in a leader. He's honest, he's trustworthy. He has a great ability to work with people, and he treats people fairly. And he can make decisions, so he's got all the aspects of a great leader that you would expect."

Food City President Steve Smith agrees. "Olan's a born leader. I think you can look at the success his organization has had over the years, the growth it's had. That doesn't happen just by accident. It happens by good leadership. It happens because of his honesty and integrity in dealing, not only with his people, but with his customers."

On the surface, Olan Jones is exactly as he appears to be: a successful executive in the financial services sector, blessed with a happy family, good friends and a reputation as a solid supporter of the communities his business serves. But scratch that veneer and you'll find there's even more to Olan Jones than meets the eye.

Olan Jones was born at Holston Valley Hospital in 1952 to parents that had their own stories of achievement and distinction. His father, Olan Otto Jones, had come out of the hills of Hancock County with only an 8th grade education, rising to become a shift foreman at Eastman, where he oversaw a shift crew of more than 100. Mrs. Jones was, as Olan remembers, not only a woman of great patience and kind-heartedness, but also great intelligence. The former Evelyn Irene Swann was fond of doing the Sunday New York Times crossword puzzle without a dictionary. Both parents impressed upon Olan and his brothers, Wayne and Richard, the importance of lifelong learning and continual improvement.

"My father started letting me mow the yard when I was in the sixth or seventh grade," Jones remembers, "and it was a big deal because he was very picky about his yard." The elder Jones generally noted where young Olan could do better, but always showed appreciation for the improvements he saw week to week. Young Olan learned the value of a dollar mowing his father's lawn, supervising the Borden Park playground in Kingsport, and doing landscaping work at J.W. Strickler. In his spare time, he played football and boxed at the Boys' Club.

When Jones went to ETSU, he did something that those who

have only known him during his corporate career will find hard to imagine. Olan Jones became a shaggy-haired 20-year-old driving a VW bus. It was during that period in his life when he met a young woman he would later refer to as "the distracting blonde driving a Ford Mustang." When Sylvia Wampler pulled that Mustang into the driveway of a mutual friend's house, Jones walked over from the VW bus to make conversation. When Sylvia smiled, Jones says, he knew at that moment she was "the one." Sylvia, on the other hand, took some convincing. She was, as Jones recalls, "a slow sell." Fortunately, within two years, Sylvia gave Jones the chance to do something his father had done before him: marry a remarkable woman.

Says family friend and ECU board member Wayne Kirk, "Sylvia is that compliment that he needs, that all people need, to give you an honest look, to give you inspiration, to help connect you with other people around you so they have a more complete picture of who you are, a more human perspective. Sylvia brings that."

Jones credits his wife for being the consummate partner. "She's always been willing to offer feedback, input, criticism and comments, and I value those. They are hard to handle sometimes, but there are things that I try to listen to, to see what I can draw out of that, what I might need to do or change or how I might approach something in a different way because she's very observant about those kinds of things. And we can share those things without getting in too much trouble with one another."

So, when Olan decided late in his college career that he would prefer a career outside his double-major field of study – psychology and sociology – he got his MBA and had Sylvia's support when he followed in his father's footsteps, taking a position at Eastman.

"In 1977," Jones says, "I hired into what was called the business career development program at Eastman. And the intent of that program was to hire you into business areas, not necessarily tech areas, but business areas and rotate you around for two to three years in a variety of six- to eight-month assignments to give you a broader spectrum of awareness of different functions." Within two years Jones was in a supervisory role. Soon thereafter, he took the payroll manager position. In a two-to-three-year span, his unit went from being the worst-rated department to the best-rated department in the division.

Jones reported to the vice president of HR for Eastman, who also happened to be chairman of the board at ECU. It was he who offered Jones the chief operations officer post at the credit union.



Jones took that job in March of 1997, with the understanding that he might have a shot at the CEO spot when the incumbent retired in around five years...Except both the incumbent CEO and the incumbent chairman of the board retired less than 9 months later, giving Olan a baptism by fire as the newly minted CEO.

“In ‘98 I was elected as Chair of the Board of Eastman Credit Union the same day that he was appointed as President,” remembers Rolston. “So, for the last 20 years, 21 years, actually, we’ve had an opportunity to work together real closely, and I’ve gotten to know him really well during that period of time.”

At the same time the credit union was undergoing that sudden leadership change, its one source of customers, Eastman Chemical Co., was downsizing. So, even though the national economy was in a growth period, ECU was starting to see its growth numbers decline. For Jones and his board, that was not tenable.

“Credit unions are just like scout troops and churches and other businesses,” Jones explains. “If you’re not growing, you’re dying. And to that end, we had to creatively kind of come up with some way, some options to find a way to continue to grow or otherwise, over time we’d just kind of steadily disappear.”

At the time, many credit unions served only one company. But if that company didn’t grow, growth for those credit unions became incredibly challenging. So, even though the board was 100 percent current Eastman employees, it was eager to hear Jones’ recommendations for growth.

The growth process began slowly. The first step was to simply expand the definition of the word family, so that Eastman employees’ parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles could join. That created nominal growth. Next, Eastman Credit Union offered its services to Food City employees and Eastman contractors.

The credit union spun off from Eastman in 2003. It changed its charter a couple of years later, and was really starting to see better growth results when the great recession hit in 2008. The credit union produced one of the better return-on-asset numbers in the country during that period, but as Jones says, “everybody got clobbered.”

Still, from that recession came an opportunity, and Jones and his

team saw it. Banks were being forced to constrain growth so their net worth would rise. That meant businesses were having a hard time getting loans they desperately needed to survive the recession. ECU was better capable of meeting the needs of those businesses.

The recession also allowed ECU to pick up prime real estate, buying recently-vacated banking facilities for very reasonable prices. ECU downsized zero people during the recession. It

skipped no bonuses. In all, it was one of the credit union’s stronger growth periods.

The fact that ECU’s executives realized the importance of the credit union’s advantage in the loan marketplace was one thing, but imparting that importance to the rank-and-file employee base would determine just how well the credit union took advantage of that opportunity.

“So, we decided we really needed to get everybody fired up about them making loans,” Rolston remembers. “Olan got dressed up in this kind of ridiculous outfit. He had this hat on that was a hair on fire thing, and it looked like it was just, you know, blazes coming out of his head. He had on a ridiculous set of glasses and so forth, and came in to an employee meeting saying, you know, “We’ve got to have our hair on fire, here, to get these loans made,” and got everybody energized around the loan program that we had in place.

Jones’ willingness to step out of his comfort zone did just what he hoped it would.

It showed the employees just

how much emphasis the credit union was putting on making those loans. Today, ECU has more than \$300 million in commercial loans, much of it based on relationships built from the credit union having literally saved companies from failing during the recession.

The other half of ECU’s secret sauce, Jones says, is member service. “In this organization we’re focused on the customer, and that’s what we do. And the folks that have done that over time have probably been more successful than they’ve ever expected at the credit union in the context of what we do. But you can’t do any of those things if you don’t treat others the way you want to be treated yourself.”

To this day, Jones meets with every class of new hires and emphasizes the importance of member service in everything they do. “Many enterprises don’t spend much money on that,” Jones



says. “The training that we’ve done with respect to things like empathy, eye contact, saying someone’s name, not staring them down, but how to go about that. And lots and lots of training around, don’t let anybody come in without saying hi, how you doing? Don’t let them get out the door without ‘have a good day,’ and do anything and everything you can while they’re there to help them out.

The Net Promoter Scores for customer service generated by ECU not only are among the very best in their industry, they are among the very best in any industry. That success, Jones says, goes back to a workplace culture based on ideals he would recommend to every JA student. “Well, I always kind of fall back on, on the notion of always be willing to work. It’s fundamental, but it’s still important to be willing to jump in and do your part, but you know beyond that, you’ve got to work with others. And you’ve got to, in order to be successful with that in the long run, I think you have to be honest as you can in relationships and function in that way, to treat others with respect. And that means everyone all the time, not just some people, some of the time in a work environment or really anywhere else.”

The success that approach has achieved for ECU is staggering. ECU has, under Olan Jones’ leadership, gone from assets of about \$650 million to, currently, \$4.5 billion. The number of employees has risen from about 100 to 800. But the success is measured in terms beyond numbers. By building on the past successes of the credit union, creating a culture of member service, serving the business community and, at present, handling roughly \$2 billion in mortgages for the residents of the region, Jones has raised up an institution with both business and social significance.

“I think good leaders like Olan always want to help build the community because if the community succeeds, his business, my business, all businesses have a better chance of succeeding and that’s the way I look at Olan,” Smith says. “He’s a true builder, he cares about his community and that comes through with everything he and his company do.”

Throughout Jones’s time at ECU, the credit union has maintained a sound philosophical base. Wherever the credit union had members, it would do what it could to improve the quality of life for those members and their communities. That, he says, won’t change in what looks to be a bright future. “I’m excited for



Back row, L to R: Paul Jones, Sarah and Greg Kitzmiller. Front row, L to R: Sylvia and Olan Jones

the future and I’m excited for the credit union with what might happen with it. I think it’s in great shape. We have an incredible staff of people there. Where we are with success, and our own understanding of it, by the way the board would look at it or our own industry, not just me. I feel like we’ve done a lot more than I expected we would ever do. And I’m very well satisfied with that.

Soon, Jones says, he’ll be ready to take time for other things in life, confident that ECU’s staff is ready for whatever awaits. “It’s time for me to think about retirement, but to me, it’s less about a time than it is about where you are and what you see as important to you. And in my case, we’ve had a long good run of success at the credit union. There’s a lot more to be done and there’s a lot of great people to do it.”

Kirk agrees that the people of ECU are ready for all their tomorrows, and he credits Jones for that. “Future growth and development is mostly going to be a function of how well and how much courage you have about surrounding yourself with the next generation,” Kirk says. “Mentoring those that you bring. And developing that pipeline of leadership. And Olan has done that. It’s a hallmark of one who is not threatened by people that are passionate about their job, who love the people they work with. They are part of a family that are willing to compete, inspire, all at the same time.”



Back row (L to R): Alan Levine, Dr. Jerry Miller, Louie Gump, Lewis Wexler, Jr., Jim Powell, Mitch Cox, Dan Mahoney, Dennis Phillips.  
 Front row (L to R): Steve Johnson, Olan Jones, Roy Harmon, Kent Bewley, Scott Niswonger, Ken Maness.

## Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame Past Laureates

### 1994

Allen Harris, Jr. (1906-1992)  
 John M. Jones (1914-2016)  
 James McGlothlin  
 Robert H. Porterfield (1905-1972)  
 James C. White (1890-1973)

### 1995

Larry Carrier (1922-2005)  
 John C. Paty (1899-1975)  
 Perley S. Wilcox (1874-1953)

### 1996

Clyde B. Austin, Sr. (1881-1966)  
 E. Ward King (1896-1977)  
 Robert S. Lane (1921-1992)  
 Joseph W. Lawson (1913-2001)  
 May Ross McDowell (1898-1988)

### 1997

Frank W. De Friece, Jr. (1921-2009)  
 W. B. Greene, Sr. (1902-1987)  
 W. Pat Jennings, Sr. (1919-1994)  
 B. Carroll Reece (1889-1961)

### 1998

Giles W. Morrill (1930-1997)  
 James J. Powell  
 Toy F. Reid (1924-2009)

### 1999

Zella Moore Arnold (1906-1989)  
 Earnest W. Deavenport, Jr.  
 Scott M. Niswonger  
 Jack C. Smith (1925-2007)

### 2000

John W. Andersen (1928-2006)  
 Charles O. Gordon, Sr. (1920-2004)  
 Woodrow W. McGlothlin (1914-2005)  
 John D. Tickle

### 2001

Samuel H. Anderson, Jr.  
 Louis H. Gump  
 Thomas G. Hull (1926-2008)  
 Frank L. Leonard (1933-2016)

### 2002

Wallace D. Alley, Sr. (1926-2015)  
 Kent Bewley  
 Lois A. Clarke  
 Dan Mahoney

### 2003

Fred "Pal" Barger  
 William B. Greene, Jr.

### 2004

C.M. "Bill" Gatton  
 Stuart E. Wood (1938-2010)

### 2005

Wayne G. Basler  
 Steven C. Smith

### 2006

Jeff Byrd (1949-2010)  
 Mitch Cox

### 2007

J. Don Hill (1929-2011)  
 Jim Street

### 2008

Richard Green  
 R.T. "Rab" Summers

### 2009

J. Brian Ferguson  
 Joseph R. Gregory

### 2010

Jerry L. Miller, M.D.  
 Keith Wilson

### 2011

Mike Quillen  
 R. Lynn Shipley, Jr.

### 2012

Dennis R. Phillips  
 James P. Rogers

### 2013

Allen Johnson  
 Ken Maness

### 2014

The Band Perry Family -  
 Kimberly, Reid, Neil, Marie  
 and Stephen

### 2015

Roy L. Harmon, Jr.  
 Mitch Walters

### 2016

Greg Boehling  
 Lewis Wexler, Jr.

### 2017

Mark J. Costa  
 Eastman

### 2018

Alan Levine

# Junior Achievement of Tri-Cities TN/VA

## 2018-2019 Contributors

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Scott & Nikki Niswonger

### AREA SHAREHOLDER

Eastman

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Brock Services  
Contura Energy  
Donaldson Company  
Eastman Credit Union  
First Tennessee Foundation  
Food City  
Mitch Cox Companies  
John Deere Foundation  
Regions Bank  
STRONGWELL  
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of Education  
Greeneville Light &  
Power System  
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Summers –Taylor  
TEC Industrial  
The Family of the Late  
John M. & Arne Jones  
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Tri-Cities Airport  
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Billy & Jennie Dickson  
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Todd Ganger  
Colette George

James Godfrey  
John E. Green, Jr.  
Louis & Lucy Gump  
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Homes  
Hands On! Discovery Center  
Kevin Harbin  
Heritage Community Bank  
Steven Huret  
Impact Management  
Indian Ridge Animal Hospital  
JC-Washington Co. Chamber  
Walter Johnson  
Kingsport Chamber of  
Commerce  
Little Family Properties  
Ken and Judy Maness  
McMillin Eyecare  
Andy Miller  
Dr. Jerry & Emma Miller  
Modern Forge  
Cindy Necessary  
Parks Group/ Leslie Pope  
Ryan Phemister  
Mrs. Toy F. Reid  
Karen Rowell  
Chris & Cathy Salley  
Supply Works  
Wilson Worley  
Wolftever Development

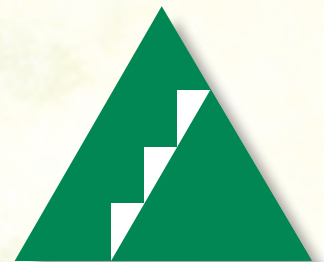
### ASSOCIATE

Corley's Pharmacy  
Andy Delwadia, MD  
Carol Hicks  
Alice & Bill Kirk  
Stephen & Adrienne Long  
Ginger Moody  
Bill & Lindy Riley  
Randy Salyers  
Wayland Seaton  
Dr. and Mrs. David Tysinger

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# Customs Global Entry enrollment center opens at TRI

International travelers seeking to take part in the US Customs/TSA Global Entry program can now make their applications at Tri-Cities Airport. Previously, travelers in the region had to drive for hours to make the mandatory in-person application. The closest enrollment centers prior to the opening of the center at the TRI were in Nashville and Charlotte, with others available at Atlanta and Washington-Dulles.

Judging from the response, the addition of the service at the TRI is a popular move. Before the office officially opened its doors May 22, it had already filled its appointment calendar for the next 60 days. Port Director Thomas Cook says consideration is already being given to expanding the hours of operation for the enrollment center, which currently run from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays.

The Global Entry program allows low risk international travelers to use kiosks to handle their Customs obligations when re-entering the U.S., rather than taking the time to go through the traditional one-on-one interaction with a Customs agent. The program also includes TSA PreCheck at no additional charge.



Customs agents enroll former TRI Customs Port Director George Faron, the first TRI-based traveler in the Global Entry program, May 22.

It's expected that Tri-Cities residents will be joined in utilizing the enrollment center by travelers based in Knoxville, Roanoke, Asheville and anywhere else closer to the TRI than to Nashville and/or Charlotte. **BJ**

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# HIGHER EDUCATION

**I**t might surprise the “opinion leaders” in larger media markets to learn that this corner of Appalachia is home to a nimble, business-friendly higher education system. The colleges and universities that dot the map of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia long ago learned of the importance of workforce development to their missions – and to their success.

The region is blessed with state schools like East Tennessee State University and the University of Virginia at Wise, both

of which will have hosted regional economic fora before the end of fall semester. There are private institutions that have found niches educating and training healthcare professionals, among others. The community colleges and colleges of applied technology train students for careers in trades, making the recruitment of outside manufacturing firms possible.

In the pages ahead, we’ll give you just a taste of the many efforts those colleges and universities are making to turn today’s students into tomorrow’s workforce.

# ETSU to host September regional economic forum

by Scott Robertson

**R**egionalism will be top-of-mind when East Tennessee State University hosts an economic forum tentatively scheduled for Sept. 10 at the Millennium Center in Johnson City.

Eastman Senior Vice President, Chief Legal and Sustainability Officer and Corporate Secretary David Golden was the first to confirm plans for the forum, saying several private sector entities have been discussing the possibility of such an event for some time. Golden was quick to add, however, that the forum will not be a private-sector-only, or even private-sector-first affair.

“To be clear,” Golden said, “for this to be successful, it’s not an Eastman initiative. It’s not a Bank of Tennessee initiative, or Food City. It needs to be a regional initiative where everyone sees the case for change and what we need to do.”

Dr. Dennis Depew, dean of the College of Business and Technology at ETSU has been running point for the university in planning the event. He agrees with Golden’s inclusive mindset. “I don’t think it’s going to be (ETSU President Dr.) Brian Noland and (Ballad Chairman and CEO) Alan Levine and (Eastman CEO) Mark Costa having a big role of giving inspiring speeches,” Depew said. “I think we’re going to have some other people engaged in this that haven’t been engaged before.”

“We’ve had a lot of conversation around how we help structure this thing in a way that it’s not top-down, that we don’t lose the grassroots folks who are out there in Carter County, in Johnson County or Erwin who may say, ‘Oh, here we go again. It’s the top brass telling us what we’re going to do,’” Depew said. “So, we’re spending a lot of time thinking about how we make this inclusive so others can know at the end of the day they’re going to have a voice. I think that’s going to be real important.”

## The blue ribbon task force

On Jan. 23, Mayors Joe Grandy of Washington County, Tenn., and Richard Venable of Sullivan County convened a meeting to nominate members of action groups to take part in a blue ribbon task force on regionalism. According to Grandy, “The deliverable at the end of this initial phase of work is to look at each specific area of the economy, whether it’s entrepreneurship or workforce development of whichever, and identify whether a regional approach is appropriate for that particular activity.”

The task force includes representatives from Greene, Unicoi and Carter Counties, Grandy said, and he hopes Hawkins and Hancock counties will take an active role as well. That scale comes with a cost, however.

The task force’s initial stated goal of bringing recommendations together by July 1 was, as Venable admitted, too ambitious. “We were dealing with 70 people from just two mayor’s offices,” he said. “So, we ended up with a little pause. But everyone has their marching orders now and we’re headed



Washington County, TN Mayor Joe Grandy and Sullivan County Mayor Richard Venable

in the right direction.”

The good news is that, “I think by September we’ll be able to give a good report,” Venable told *The Business Journal* in May.

“Each committee has had its first meeting and we’re well underway,” Venable said. “The facilitators are doing a really good job, and we have interns from ETSU who are just invaluable.”

## The brand

One question that will hopefully be answered well in advance of the ETSU summit is the brand by which the region will be known in external marketing materials. The effort known as “It’s all in a name,” funded by the region’s municipal governments should have a recommendation in place before the event.

Phase I of that group’s efforts was an online community survey at [nameourregion.com](http://nameourregion.com). That survey is closed. A second phase included an external perception study that was entered into three markets, Nashville, Charlotte and Atlanta. That data will be added to the market research and the key interviews that the consultant, North Star Destination Strategies conducted on a site visit. North Star will use that data to boil the choices down to a few brand names. Then North Star will submit those names to marketing professionals across the nation as a final test. A final recommendation is expected in mid-July.

## Why now?

It’s been more than a year since the drive for regionalism began to take hold. Initial discussions led to a joint effort between Northeast Tennessee’s three major chambers of commerce. Once the public sector saw the private sector was



Dennis Depew

serious about discussing regional economic development, governments began discussing their own plans and preferences. The blue ribbon task force and nameourregion.com are outgrowths of that response.

The September meeting is an effort to bring both sides, plus other interested parties, to the same table, since most everyone's goals appear to be at least superficially aligned.

"We were getting a lot of parallel conversation going and they all had good ideas but we didn't have a good way to converge those conversations," said Will Barrett, market president for Bank of Tennessee and vice chairman of the Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership (NeTREP). "I could see too that around the conversations that were going on, some people were beginning to take offense because they weren't included. So, at some point we had to have a mechanism that really involves everyone, that brings everyone to the table."

Jerry Caldwell, general manager of Bristol Motor Speedway and one of the three 2018 chamber presidents who spearheaded the regionalism push, said, "On the public side, you have a lot of experience. You have individuals who have seen what works and what has its challenges.

Those are important voices. They

need to be listened to. Also, you have experience on the private side, with individuals who have a ton of experience and have businesses other places. They've done research and they know what's working in those other communities. We need to bring those voices all together."

The September event also has the potential to strengthen the effort by including more than just the traditional players in economic development, Barrett said. "I think a broader regional economic summit could bring everyone to the table, not just the top players but the grassroots players, the community development players and the faith-based organizations."

The key to success, said Levine, will be all parties being willing to define and work toward shared goals. "Personally, what I'm hoping is that as a region, we can speak with one voice about what our priorities are."

Golden is optimistic that can happen. "I think there'll be convergence over time and from what I've seen as far as conversations, I think everybody wants the same thing," Golden said. "It's just we start at different places with different perspectives because we are different. I don't think the governmental sector



David Golden

is going to be mistaken for the private sector nor the private for the governmental sector. It's different perspectives. But I think if people trust each other they tend to work with one another, particularly if there is a common goal."

#### How will regional economic development work?

The CEOs of NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership and NeTREP, Northeast Tennessee's two major economic development organizations, said they're approaching the event with open minds. Clay Walker, CEO of NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership, said, "I think that anytime we can get together in a meaningful way and have constructive dialogue about our region, shared strategies and missions, even potential restructuring ideas that can make us all more competitive, it's a very good, worthwhile idea. The dialogue has been encouraging in recent months; I certainly know when Mitch and I have met to work on ways to be more effective through collaboration, it has always yielded positive results. It will be a very big step to bring all of the groups discussing similar topics together... it's kind of the very definition of regionalism."

Mitch Miller, CEO of NeTREP, said, "My hope would be that we come up with some initiatives or directives that say, 'here are ways we can work together.' I think the bigger picture hope would be that we come up with a collaborative effort between public and private sectors to create an entity that works for everyone so we can market the region as a whole."

#### The venue

ETSU was the natural choice to host the event, Barrett said. "I think that ETSU is a good independent venue, especially when you've got your state-chartered universities that have their own economic statistics departments that can hopefully give you non-biased independent financial information and insight into the region."

"We as a university want to be perceived as a good broker," Depew concluded. "We don't have all the answers, but we think we can provide some leadership in bringing everybody together and recognizing voices at many different levels."



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Scott Klososky PHOTOS BY EARL NIEKIRK



Dario and Wendy Marquez, Rusty Justice

## UVA-Wise hosts Southwest Virginia Economic Forum

Themed “Transforming through technology,” the 2019 Southwest Virginia Economic Forum on the campus of the University of Virginia at Wise brought together a line-up of speakers featuring investors, entrepreneurs, players in GO Virginia and a noted tech company founder.

Technology expert Scott Klososky used the keynote address to encourage attendees to move toward earlier adoption of technologies in an effort to bring economic growth to the region.

“Humans and technology are integrating in a way we’ve never seen,” Klososky said. “It will completely change the economy.” New connections have the ability to revolutionize the economy just as the connectedness brought by the Internet did years ago. “If you understand this model, you can make a lot of money building businesses because you understand that connections can be incredibly valuable.”

The key for a region such as Southwest Virginia, Klososky said, would be to “get really good at two different things.” Lots of communities are good at one thing – networking, cybersecurity, etc., Klososky said, but it’s those that leverage two different areas of technology that will prosper most.

Klososky advocated for “high beam thinking,” a term for thinking farther down the road than one’s peers. Those companies that think two years ahead will prosper while those that wait for others to establish best practices before moving into new technologies will be taking a “we go seventh” approach.

Wendy Marquez, founder of Wize Solutions, gave the morning keynote, taking the opportunity to call on attendees to ask their state government representatives to make changes to the



Shannon Blevins, associate vice chancellor

Commonwealth’s procurement policies, which heavily favor companies in northern Virginia over start-ups in the southwest.

While the state gets behind training for tech students west of Roanoke, Marquez said, it has used procurement rules demanding that suppliers have a workforce with certain levels of experience to virtually shut out any company more than a short drive away from Richmond. “The message is, you can get a good education at UVA-Wise, but if you need a job, go to Richmond,” said Marquez.

The Marquezes invested a year ago in Wize Solutions, aiming to earn contract work that is currently going to more expensive northern Virginia firms by utilizing southwest Virginia workers trained at UVA-Wise, ETSU and the Virginia Community College System. Theoretically, costs to hire Wize should be lower, but Virginia policies have limited the company’s ability to get contracts.

The Marquezes were joined in a panel discussion by Rusty Justice of Bit Source, LLC. Justice shared his company’s successes having risen from a start-up to an inspirational story of rural can-do spirit. A few years ago, Justice read a quote by former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg saying, “You’re not going to teach a coal miner to code. Mark Zuckerberg says you teach them to code and everything will be great. I don’t know how to break it to you... but no.” Justice promptly built a business teaching out-of-work coal miners to code.

Other sessions included a panel discussion of GO Virginia funding in Region 1 and a statistical State of the Region report from UVA’s Larry Terry.

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## Milligan's area of education receives top score in provider impact

In the Tennessee State Board of Education's annual report card for the state's teacher education programs, graduates of Milligan College's teacher education programs received the top result for provider impact among schools ranked on a 75-point scale, scoring above 28 other teacher education programs including Vanderbilt University, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, Belmont University and East Tennessee State University.

Provider impact is the most weighted category on the overall report card, and it measures the impact educators have on students' performances in K-12 classrooms. Provider impact scores are derived from teacher observations scored by the local school district and student scores on tests for the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). TVAAS testing evaluates how schools and teachers impact students' academic progress.

"As former teachers ourselves, our faculty are pleased to know our graduates are effectively impacting students in the classroom and aiding their academic progress," said Dr. Angela Hilton-Prillhart, Milligan's area chair of education. "Milligan's top score in provider impact reinforces our program's emphasis on high-quality clinical experiences, in addition to the support we provide to our candidates as they enter the field."

Milligan's teacher education programs emphasize first-hand

experience in the classroom, exposing candidates to local schools in their first semester.

"The amount of hours that our candidates spend in the field separates us from other institutions," noted Mark Dula, assistant professor of education. "Milligan has developed great relationships with our local school systems, and these partnerships allow our candidates to receive high-quality exposure to classrooms long before they begin student teaching or an internship."

Milligan's faculty serve as supervisors for candidates as they transition into internships and student teaching, and they continue to mentor candidates once they enter the field.

"As a student teacher, I was visited only twice by my supervisor," recounted Hilton-Prillhart. "At Milligan, our supervisors reach out weekly or bi-weekly, translating into consistent opportunities for feedback, adjustments and encouragement."

In addition, Milligan's teacher education programs continued to score well in teacher employment on the state report card. Most notably, Milligan's teacher education programs scored 100 percent in two-year retention, indicating that any Milligan graduate who accepted a job in Tennessee's public schools remained in that position for a second year. Milligan's second year and third year retention rates for employment were above the state average.

## Emory & Henry welcomes PA class of 2021

The Emory & Henry College School of Health Sciences held a White Coat Ceremony May 20 welcoming the Physician Assistant Studies program class of 2021 at the Lincoln Theatre in Marion, Va.

The ceremony welcomed 29 students to the Class of 2021 as they begin their path towards completing the graduate program. Taking place at the Lincoln Theatre in Marion, Va., the students were presented their white coats in front of their friends and family.

President Jake B. Schrum and program director Dr. Scott Richards and the MPAS program faculty welcomed first and second-year graduate students and explained the meaning behind the white coat ceremony. The ceremony concluded with students and faculty reciting the Physicians Assistant (PA) Professional Oath.

Clinical activities are embedded throughout the entirety of the 27-month program, with students beginning clinical experiences in their very first week of training at the Mel Leaman Free Clinic at Emory & Henry College School of Health Sciences, located on the Marion Campus.

Students will attend the program year-round for 27 months and earn a master's degree. Physician Assistants are advanced practice medical professionals who practice in every primary and specialty care area in a collaborative relationship with physicians and other health-care team members.

The MPAS program's curriculum features evidence-based



teaching and evaluation methods with emphasis on case-based and experiential learning, incorporating active learning strategies including case-based and team-based learning. Richards states the program is relatively unique among other PA programs in the U.S.

The program, housed in the new state-of-the-art facilities on the Marion campus, utilizes a 22-bay clinical skills lab and classroom, a simulation suite with both standardized patient examination rooms and high-fidelity simulation mannequin hospital rooms. Students also have access to a dedicated state-of-the-art cadaver lab.

The program is fully accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

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## Northeast State celebrates Haas Foundation scholarship recipients

Northeast State recognized the recipients of the Gene Haas Scholarship this spring at the Regional Center of Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) Academy on May 13. The students earned college credits for classes taken through the College's dual enrollment program.

The Gene Haas Scholarship recipients for the spring semester are: Kaitlin Forbes; Laura Franklin; Trinity Hall; Kayla Honaker; Nichole C. Kelly; Hayven Miller; Mabel Olson; Samantha Padgett; Taylor Reeves; Amanda Slagle; and Campbell Smith.

"We would love for you to come back to Northeast State down the road and talk to us about how these classes helped you," Northeast State's vice president of Economic and Workforce Development, Dr. Sam Rowell, told the students. "Let us know how your careers are going."

The scholarship recipients are dual enrollment students. Students focused their classes in Computer-Aided Drafting (CAD) and the Machine Tool Operations. The students hail from the local high schools of Sullivan East (Forbes, Honaker, Kelly, Olson, and Smith), David Crockett (Franklin, Hall, Miller, and Slagle), and Daniel Boone (Padgett and Reeves). The Gene Haas Scholarship gave priority selection to qualified female students, students from underrepresented populations, and students who did not receive the Pell Grant.

Northeast State's RCAM Academy at Kingsport provides technical training capabilities and dual enrollment opportunities

for high school students around the region. The RCAM Academy uses a large Machine Tool/CNC laboratory with new machining technology critical for world-class instruction.

"It's very encouraging to see these young ladies showing interest in advanced manufacturing and taking these courses to better prepare themselves for their future," said Heath McMillian, director of RCAM.

Northeast State offers a 26-credit-hour technical certificate in Computer-Aided Drafting and 31-credit-hour certificate in Machine Tool Operations. Both certificates are part of an associate of applied science degree and all courses count toward the completion of a degree.

The Computer-Aided Drafting curriculum prepares mechanical or CAD drafters to create diagrams of machinery and mechanical devices. A trained drafter can use two- or three-dimensional CAD software to create a variety of drawings used in manufacturing and engineering.

The Machine Tool program teaches students how to operate manufacturing equipment to include machine lathes, mills, grinders, and CAD/CAM software. Machinists and CNC operators use print specifications designed in CAD software to create machine parts for a near endless variety of manufacturing applications.

"There is a lot of creativity required in manufacturing," said Rowell. "We are very proud of these students for taking the challenge of learning these technical skills."

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## TCAT Elizabethton prepares to welcome "signing day" students for fall trimester

When the Tennessee College of Applied Technology at Elizabethton welcomes its class for the fall 2019 trimester, several of the students will have already celebrated their choice to advance their education at the TCAT in a very public way.

Just as college-bound scholarship athletes sign letters of intent on national signing day in front of cameras and on social media, several TCAT-bound students participated in a signing day of their own this spring.

TCAT Elizabethton held its third annual National Technical Letter of Intent Signing Day at the Main Campus across from the Elizabethton Municipal Airport.

Students from Elizabethton, Happy Valley, Unaka, Hampton, Cloudland, Johnson County, and Science Hill high schools plan to attend to indicate their chosen field of study in the 2019 fall trimester.

"By signing incoming students to Letters of Intent, we are telling them that a place has been reserved for them. Technical education will prepare them for a strong career," said Dean Blevins, president of TCAT Elizabethton.

The event, sponsored by the National Coalition of Certification Centers, mirrors the NCAA's National Signing Day for athletes who commit to play sports in college. It is designed to honor



Danny O'Quinn, vice president of TCAT Elizabethton, announced there would be additional training programs offered beginning in the 2019 fall trimester.

students who are entering a technical field and to celebrate the dignity of work.



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NORTHEAST STATE

# Summit for Childhood Success held at Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center

More than 500 leaders in the fields of education, health care and business gathered May 23 at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon for a statewide Rural Summit for Childhood Success. The summit, designed to address the impact the addiction epidemic is having on rural areas in Virginia, was hosted by the United Way of Southwest Virginia. Utilizing the Higher Education Center's broadband and connectivity capabilities, the summit was live-streamed across the Commonwealth.

The summit addressed issues adversely affecting the prosperity of the region including addiction, outmigration and poverty. "Not only are families and individuals struggling because of the addiction epidemic, there is a disproportionate impact on the systems that serve our citizens, including the early childhood system, which includes health care, social services, educational settings, early childcare settings, employers, law enforcement, and the court system," said Todd Norris, senior vice president for community health at Ballad Health.

The Rural Summit for Childhood Success offered keynotes and workshops on best practices for professionals in rural settings to address Adverse Child Experiences (ACEs), trauma, and resiliency using collective impact.

"The Rural Summit for Childhood Success has been a critically important first step to share the impact of ACEs and trauma on children, families, and child-serving systems in rural areas. I am glad that United Way of Southwest Virginia has stepped up to serve as the backbone organization for the Trauma-Informed Community Network in Southwest Virginia. Joining the statewide network of TICNs will give local organizations access to resources, training, education, and tools that create more trauma-informed organizations," said Lisa Topshee, director of prevention services with Highlands Community Services.

Conference attendees included rural school superintendents, health districts, community action agencies, community services boards, departments of social services, city/county governments, businesses, economic development agencies, workforce investment boards, and health systems. The conference featured learning tracks for professionals just learning about ACEs, trauma, and resiliency, professionals with a moderate amount of knowledge, and experts and thought leaders ready to learn effective interventions for childhood success, including collective impact and resiliency.

The Summit was hosted by United Way of Southwest Virginia and organized by a steering committee of local, state, and federal leaders.

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## King University nursing grads achieving perfect pass rate on licensure exam

A major restructuring of the King University nursing program on the Bristol campus has had the desired effect. For the last two semesters, graduates of the program have exceeded the national average by achieving a 100 percent pass rate on the licensure exam for registered nurses.

Each of the students earned Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degrees at King's main campus in either May or December of 2018, then passed the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nursing (NCLEX-RN) on the first attempt. The test is administered by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN).

"This tremendous success is indicative of the academic strength of King's recently restructured BSN program and the extraordinary quality of its people," said President Alexander Whitaker. "The comprehensive improvements implemented have positioned King's nursing graduates to successfully transition from the classroom to the workplace while also ensuring they are well prepared to deliver exceptional patient care in our region and beyond."

In 1999, King accepted its first students into the traditional Nursing program, which allows newcomers to the profession to earn a BSN and then take the NCLEX-RN required to work as a registered nurse. The Tennessee Board of Nursing closely

monitors performance on the licensure exam and, during a 2016 review, raised concerns about the success rate of King's graduates. Following an internal evaluation, King leaders voluntarily ceased admission to the program until a more thorough review could be completed.

Tracy Slemple, dean of King's School of Nursing, said she worked closely with university leaders and faculty members for more than a year to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the program. Sweeping changes were made to a variety of components that directly impact instruction she said, before the Tennessee Board of Nursing reinstated full approval status in February 2018. King began accepting students again last fall.

May 2018 graduates of King's BSN program achieved a 93 percent pass rate, and the university's overall NCLEX pass rate for 2018 was 88 percent. This includes all students who tested during 2018, regardless of when they graduated. The national pass rate for 2018 was 88.29 percent.

Those graduating with a BSN from King in December 2018 were all enrolled on the Bristol campus.

In addition to its BSN program, King offers Bachelor of Science in Nursing for Registered Nurses (RN-BSN), Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs.

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The Higher Education Center also has approximately 100,000 square feet of space available for rent. The Joseph P. Johnson Jr. Grand Hall is the largest and most accommodating space, where banquets, conferences, and weddings often take place. All available spaces include excellent tech equipment such as computer, projector, and screen, free of charge with on-site tech support available to assist any customer.



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## Tusculum readying Niswonger College of Optometry for students in 2020

Addressing a major health issue in the Appalachian region, Tusculum University is creating a college of optometry that will improve the quality of life and serve as a catalyst for further growth as the higher education institution celebrates a major milestone in its storied history.

The university is moving swiftly to renovate portions of the Meen Center, a state-of-the-art building, to accommodate the Niswonger College of Optometry. Construction crews are preparing areas Tusculum needs for optometric examination labs, an optics lab, an anatomy lab, a primary care ophthalmic surgery suite and patient exam rooms.

That work is nearing completion – to be followed by a second phase that will last about a year. Tusculum projects enrolling its first class of 70 students for the four-year program in fall 2020, pending the receipt of preliminary approval for accreditation. “We’re working to build the very best college of optometry in the country,” said Dr. James Hurley, Tusculum’s president. “It will be a college of inclusion and opportunity, one that focuses on meeting the ocular needs of the young and old, the rich and poor and the people who have been denied access for far too long. Ocular disease is rapidly growing out of control across Appalachia, and we have to stop it.”

When Tusculum receives all needed approvals, it will have the 24th College of Optometry in the nation and just the fifth in the South.

The college of optometry is named after Scott Niswonger, a prominent philanthropist in the region who earned a bachelor’s degree and an honorary doctorate from Tusculum and sits on the university’s Board of Trustees. The decision honored Niswonger’s commitment to the college of optometry and his unwavering support of Tusculum for the past 30 years.

Tusculum leaders have completed a feasibility study and a self-study of the college of optometry and have regularly met with representatives of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, from which the College of Optometry is seeking accreditation. The university has completed the first phase of the accreditation process.

The work on the college of optometry is appropriate for Tusculum, the first higher education institution in Tennessee, as the university celebrates its 225th anniversary in 2019. University leaders say it is an opportunity to recognize how far Tusculum has come while taking the next step in advancing quality.

“Our creation of the College of Health Sciences has been a bold venture, and the university has shown its determination and ability for it to succeed by immediately starting a new college of optometry,” said Dr. Andrew Buzzelli, the founding dean. “The Board of Trustees has chosen to marry our 225-year legacy of civic engagement to our desire to provide not only health care education but also health care accessibility to Northeast Tennessee, Appalachia and other parts of rural America.”

Dr. Buzzelli said the college of optometry will be the first to train physicians exclusively in the contemporary practice of optometric



Dr. James Hurley, left, Tusculum University’s president, and Dr. Greg Nelson, chairman of Tusculum’s Board of Trustees, review construction plans for the Niswonger College of Optometry.



Hurley and Nelson recently visited construction taking place for the Niswonger College of Optometry.

medicine. Besides conducting eye exams and issuing prescriptions for glasses and contacts, optometrists now prescribe eye drops or oral medications for more serious eye conditions.

In addition to construction activity, the college of optometry has filled all of its administrative positions. It has also hired the faculty to teach students in the first year, and that roster will include many College of Health Sciences administrators. Other faculty members include community-based vision care providers.

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## Virginia Highlands Community College LearningPLUS+ assessment shows promise

In 2015, Virginia's community colleges determined four sets of soft skills were notably lacking in the workforce the system was putting out: communications, professionalism, problem solving and teamwork. Each college was charged with addressing those issues.

To that end, in 2017 Virginia Highlands Community College introduced the LearningPLUS+ initiative. The first results of that initiative are in, and, says Ken Fairbanks, LearningPLUS+ director at the college, the initiative seems to be working.

Following year-one of LearningPLUS+, Fairbanks says, the college observed the following increases in student scores on its end-of-program soft skills assessment:

- Communication: 14%
- Teamwork: 12%
- Professionalism 10%
- Problem-Solving: 10%

"We believe these early results are indicative of the positive impact that LearningPLUS+ is having on our students," Fairbanks says.

Research shows "soft skills 101" courses simply don't work, Fairbanks says, so the college designed LearningPLUS+ to be contextual to what students are already doing.

"The learning is accomplished through hands-on activities in the courses the students are already taking," Fairbanks says. "We've baked the soft-skills instruction into those courses."

Math courses now involve problem-solving elements. English courses involve communication soft skill instruction. Profession-



alism is being taught in more specific courses. "A nursing student is going to learn professionalism in nursing courses, because professionalism means something different in nursing than it does in welding or air conditioning," Fairbanks says.

Additionally, students are required to look beyond the classroom to complete a comprehensive capstone experience prior to graduation.

"I tell students, 'the difference between a graduate who takes an entry-level position and stays in it for 20 years and a graduate who gets that same entry-level position but then grows in the organization is usually not a matter of technical skills, it's the soft skills.'" **BJ**

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# Crown Laboratories' busy month

**B**uoyed by investors with an eye for strategic acquisitions, Johnson City-based Crown Laboratories continues growing at a meteoric pace. In addition to announcing two new acquisitions in May, the company also unveiled a corporate rebranding. Crown is also considering whether to expand in its hometown or move the corporate headquarters.

## The rebranding

“Since its early days, Crown’s growth engine has been its Blue Lizard Australian Sunscreen franchise,” said Jeff Bedard, president and CEO of Crown Laboratories. “However, we always envisioned a strategy that included continued internal development as well as acquisitions that would broaden our focus outside of sun care. That strategy has led Crown to now have major business units focused on aesthetic medicine, generic and branded dermatological prescription drugs, OTC and prestige beauty.

“By identifying and commercializing relevant, impactful treatments that provide value for medical providers and their patients, we are securing our foothold in, and committing to, expanding our presence in the medical and aesthetic dermatology marketplace. Our new tagline, ‘Skin Science for Life’ further defines the connection to Crown’s portfolio and our partnership with our physicians and the patients they treat. No matter the stage of life, Crown has a science-driven skin care solution that fits the individual’s needs. Our recent acquisitions continue to fulfill the long-term goal of Crown’s Brands, providing skin care solutions through life’s journey.”

## HD PRP

Crown’s Bellus Medical recently acquired Healeon Medical, Inc.’s HD PRP system for the aesthetic marketplace. The system, said the company in a May 19 release, is designed to meet the demands of busy practices seeking higher volume and higher yield Platelet Rich Plasma procedures. As part of the expanding Platelet Rich Plasma portfolio, Bellus Medical will re-brand their suite of offerings as the ProGen PRPTM Advantage and ProGen PRPTM Versa lines; both high-yield systems for use in Platelet Rich Plasma procedures.

Bellus’ expanded Platelet Rich Plasma portfolio, the company said, will offer the lowest cost per milliliter and greatest ROI for providers across the industry. “One of the core pillars of Bellus Medical is innovation and continuing technological advancements,” said Joe Proctor, founder and president of Bellus Medical. “Expanding our Platelet Rich Plasma portfolio with a system that addresses the needs of high-volume practices uniquely positions us to add immediate value to the market.”

“Healeon is proud of its newly announced partnership with Bellus Medical, offering best-in-class treatment options across the industry,” said Jeff Greiner, CEO of Healeon Medical.

“We strive to always provide our patients with gold standard therapies,” Bedard added. “Platelet Rich Plasma has quickly become an ideal treatment for many dermatology patients.”

## Xycrobe Therapeutics

The same day it announced the HD PRP deal, Crown also announced it had acquired Xycrobe Therapeutics, Inc.

“Xycrobe’s technology focuses on utilizing the ubiquitous nature of skin microbes by turning them into vehicles for the delivery of biotherapeutics,” Crown said in a release. “By developing innovations that take advantage of these microbes, better solutions are possible for an array of clinical indications. Xycrobe technology addresses the needs of patients with inflammatory skin disease through the development of ‘good’ bacteria strains, designed to be used for therapeutic purposes.”

Said Bedard, “Acquiring Xycrobe Therapeutics is a significant milestone, as it not only allows us to explore the ways we will leverage microbiome science across our portfolio, but also brings a very talented team of scientists to our R&D group.

“Incorporating this technology into our portfolio will be a major focus and once commercialized, will elevate our place in therapeutic skin care. I am inspired by the team and the research to date and look forward to significant innovation coming out of this group in the near future.”


“We continue to seek opportunities that will enhance our portfolio,” added David Solomon, Partner of Hildred Capital Partners and Chairman of Crown. “Investing in innovative science to deliver novel skin care treatments supports our mission of providing high quality therapies for our physicians and their patients.”

## Johnson City goes all in

As Crown expands, it is considering whether to move its corporate headquarters to the site of one of the newly acquired companies, or expand in Johnson City. The city government of Johnson City last month offered an incentive package to Crown to stay.

The Johnson City Commission voted unanimously May 2 to sign a letter of support to authorize a \$450,000 grant to Crown to help the company expand its Johnson City operations. Crown has said it plans to create more than 200 new jobs, more than doubling its Johnson City workforce, and to invest around \$27 million in the project. In addition to the grant, the city would provide a property tax abatement of up to 100 percent for ten years following completion of the expansion. Crown is also in talks with the state of Tennessee regarding possible incentives.

The products acquired by Crown are made at locations across the country. The company says it would like to consolidate manufacturing operations in Johnson City. It is also looking into expanding its corporate headquarters to a larger space in the city.

The letter provided by the commission is not a final agreement, only a letter of support. A final contract would need to be voted on by the commission when it is agreed on by all parties. 

# Tennessee General Assembly approves Pinnacle-like incentive package for Boones Creek

by Dave Ongie

Before The Pinnacle could become a \$200 million retail sales juggernaut in Sullivan County, the Tennessee General Assembly had to approve a retail tourism incentive plan to help the developer lure businesses to the site. Last month, the General Assembly approved a similar bill targeted to a 950-acre area near Exit 17 of Interstate 26 in Washington County.

The bill, which was co-sponsored in the House by State Representatives Matthew Hill, Timothy Hill and Micah Van Huss and sponsored by Rusty Crowe in the Senate, is nearly identical to the Border Region Retail Tourism Development District Act that was passed in 2011 that paved the way for The Pinnacle development in Bristol. Under the auspices of the new bill, the city of Johnson City will have the opportunity to designate 950 acres within a half-mile of I-26 off Exit 17 as a regional retail tourism development district and leverage a portion of future sales tax revenues to incentivize development.

Some last-minute politicking was required to assure passage of the bill. With time running out May 2, Crowe and Matthew Hill worked to reconcile differences between the version that passed the House and the one that ultimately passed the Senate. The major bone of contention was a provision in the Senate bill that would have only allowed Johnson City to leverage the state's portion of sales tax revenue generated in the district for 15 years instead of the 30-year period laid out in the House version. The final version of the bill will allow Johnson City 30 years to collect and utilize a portion of the state's share of tax dollars to help pay for the development of the district.

With the heavy lifting in Nashville out of the way, the ball will be squarely in Johnson City's court once Gov. Bill Lee signs the bill into law. Johnson City's Board of Commissioners will be charged with passing an ordinance, which will lead to the development of a master plan for the district that will need to be presented to the state for approval. City Manager Pete Peterson said the footprint of the 950-acre district will need to be plotted carefully.

"What has to happen at this point is the city's got to adopt an ordinance asking the state to certify a location and a master plan for the development," Peterson said. "So, the proposed development, in order to qualify for the state certification, must generate a million visitors a year. It requires the investment to exceed \$20



Rusty Crowe FILE PHOTO



Matthew and Timothy Hill FILE PHOTO

million to build the site, and it's got to generate more than \$2 million a year in state sales tax."

If the City's plan is approved at the state level, Johnson City will be able to begin aggressively recruiting businesses to locate around Exit 17. Peterson is confident that, armed with revenue from the state to pay for construction and virtually every other aspect of the development, the city will be able to attract high-end retail, restaurants and entertainment with highly competitive packages.

In fact, he said there is already a group interested in developing some property near I-26. But with the potential to develop so much acreage, Peterson said the work of identifying properties and bundling them together into a district is just beginning. "At this point in time, there is a group interested in doing something at the Boones Creek exit. Peterson said. "They have, to my knowledge, one parcel identified, which is not 950 acres. We've got an opportunity to develop 950 acres. It would be pretty foolish to be short-sighted and just propose something that's going to be less than that."

Much work remains before the first shovel of dirt is turned, but the bill's senate sponsor is upbeat about the possibilities. Reached by *The Business Journal* on his drive home from Nashville as the session ended, Crowe said, "Everyone seems to think this is probably the major piece of economic development legislation in recent times for our area." ■

**ON THE MOVE**

**Bob Cantler** was introduced May 15 as president and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce serving Johnson City, Jonesborough and Washington County, as well as the Chamber Foundation. Cantler will begin his duties July 1.



Bob Cantler

“Our search committee reviewed many fine candidates during this process, but Bob’s unique background and proven commitment to business in our region is extraordinary,” said Chamber Chairman Neil Poland. “He is the ideal person to lead our organization for the years ahead.”

“I have admired the good work of the Chamber and its employees for many years and want to be part of the success of a great organization in our community, region and nation,” Cantler said.

Cantler most recently worked as a business consultant focused on the retail and hospitality industry with Johnson City’s Model Mill. He also served as vice president and general manager of the General Morgan Inn in Greeneville and director of Sales and Marketing at the MeadowView Marriott Conference, Resort and Convention Center in Kingsport and Corporate Sales Manager at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville.

Cantler will replace Chamber President and CEO Gary Mabrey who served the organization for the past 31 years. “Bob’s entrepreneur spirit as a small-business man, after running his own business for the past few years, gives him a great perspective on our Chamber membership,” Mabrey said. “His experience and attitude make him a great fit for our organization. My heartiest congratulations to the search committee and the board’s acceptance of the recommendation.”

**Lindy White**, chief executive officer of Ballad Health’s Kingsport operations, has been selected to serve as president of the Northwest Market, which includes Ballad Health’s two Kingsport hospitals as well as hospitals in Hawkins, Hancock, Wise and Dickenson Counties, and the planned hospital in Lee County.

White began her new position on June 1, succeeding Monty McLaurin, who will retire at the end of the year. McLaurin will continue to serve in an advisory capacity on a number of projects for the remainder of the year; his retirement follows a long and successful career history that includes a 15-year tenure in Kingsport.

“It is an honor to be appointed to this role, and I am so excited to jump right in and begin collaborating with all the hospitals in the Northwest Market,” said White. “During my time as the leader of the Kingsport Market, I think we’ve made wonderful progress, and I look forward to working closely with our other great hospitals in the Northwest Market to support them as they seek to achieve their potential.

“Our hospitals in Hawkins, Hancock, Wise and Dickenson counties are fortunate to have strong and passionate leaders who have earned my respect and admiration. The culture in this region is so positive, and you can really see the pride in all these facilities. I am committed to assisting these leaders where needed to help strengthen healthcare in their communities and

ensure they have the support they need to be successful.”

With more than 20 years of experience in the region, White returned to the area in January to serve Ballad Health’s Kingsport hospitals as CEO of Holston Valley Medical Center and Indian Path Community Hospital.

As president of the larger market, White will now be responsible for leading Holston Valley Medical Center, Hawkins County Memorial Hospital, Hancock County Hospital, Indian Path Community Hospital, Lonesome Pine Hospital, Mountain View Regional Hospital, Norton Community Hospital and Dickenson Community Hospital, as well as the hospital Ballad Health is working with the Lee County Hospital Authority to reopen in Pennington Gap, Va. She will ensure the facilities maintain high-quality care and work together to pursue the long-term strategic vision of Ballad Health to improve the health of the community.

While she will be the new market leader, White’s primary responsibility will continue to be her role as CEO of Ballad Health’s hospitals in the Kingsport market, where Holston Valley serves as the tertiary hub for the surrounding counties and hospitals.

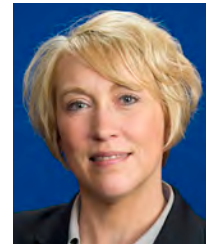
White is a native of Southwest Virginia, and owns a farm in Gate City, Virginia. She was born at Smyth County Community Hospital, and began her career in healthcare there as a staff accountant in 1992. During her time there, she earned a string of promotions, eventually becoming the hospital’s chief executive officer in 2005.

Before her return to Ballad Health, White served as the chief executive officer of Providence Northeast Hospital in Columbia, South Carolina, which is part of LifePoint Health.

White has a long history with Ballad Health, serving as the chief executive officer of Franklin Woods Community Hospital and Woodridge Hospital. While under her leadership, both facilities received national awards for clinical quality, patient satisfaction and nursing excellence. From 2014 to 2018, Franklin Woods was twice named one of the top 100 hospitals in the U.S. by Truven Health Analytics and received the Pathway to Excellence designation from the American Nurses Credentialing Center. During that time, Woodridge Hospital received the Press Ganey Guardian of Excellence Award for patient satisfaction three years in a row.

“Lindy is an inspiring leader with a bold vision,” said Eric Deaton, Ballad Health’s senior vice president of market operations. “She’s a great fit to lead our Northwest Market into the future, and I’m confident she’ll quickly earn the respect and esteem of our team members and physicians throughout the market.

“Monty has been an advocate for healthcare in this region, and a prominent leader in Kingsport and its surrounding areas, for many years. I am grateful to Monty for his leadership during the merger and the first year of operations of the Northwest Market. On a personal note, I consider Monty to be a great friend, and I’m pleased to have had the opportunity to work with him.”



Lindy White

**DEPARTMENTS, CONTINUED**

**AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

**Wilcox earns CEcD designation**

Aundrea Wilcox, CEcD, executive director of The Kingsport Office of Small Business Development & Entrepreneurship (KOSBE), at the Kingsport Area Chamber of Commerce, has earned the designation of Certified Economic Developer (CEcD), a national recognition that denotes a mastery of skills in economic development, professional attainment and a commitment to personal and professional growth. The CEcD exam was administered by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) on April 13-14, 2019 in Washington, DC, at the Washington Court Hotel.

In 2006, Wilcox was hired into her executive leadership role at the Kingsport Chamber, to direct the development and execution of the organization's strategy to assist entrepreneurs with resources/information and facilitate growth of new/existing small businesses to drive economic/job growth in the Kingsport market. In 2011, the Kingsport Chamber announced a partnership between KOSBE and the Tennessee Small Business Development Center (TSBDC) also becoming the TSBDC at ETSU Kingsport Affiliate Office. In addition to an expanded service area now covering five counties (Hamblen, Hancock, Hawkins, Grainger and Sullivan), the partnership has enhanced

the operation and sustainability of KOSBE.

Since taking on her role, Wilcox has contributed to starting more than 80 businesses, creating 579 new jobs, assisting 927 distinct clients, helping raise capital formation over \$32 million for local companies, and assisting several clients with applying for minority, veteran, and woman-owned business certifications resulting in these companies achieving certifications and securing new contracts totaling more than \$15 million.

The CEcD designation recognizes qualified and dedicated practitioners in the economic development field and sets the standard of excellence within the profession. Candidates must pass a comprehensive and rigorous proctored examination, which has three parts and spans two days. The exam tests a practitioner's knowledge, proficiency and judgment in the following key areas of economic development:

- Business Retention and Expansion
- Finance & Credit Analysis
- Marketing and Attraction
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- Entrepreneurial & Small Business Development
- Managing Economic Development Organizations
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- Real Estate Development & Reuse
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- Workforce Development Strategies

There are currently over 1,100 active CEcDs in the United States.



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**Tri-Cities PRSA recognizes top work**

Public relations and communications professionals from the Tri-Cities region were recently honored for outstanding work at the Tri-Cities Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) annual Awards Celebration.

The celebration honored 25 projects with awards of Excellence (first place), Quality (second place) and Merit (third place) in a wide range of categories to capture the breadth of work in communications and public relations. Judges from the PRSA chapter in Memphis evaluated entries on criteria that included planning, execution, evaluation and effective use of budget.

The Tri-Cities Chapter also presented its highest service award, the Rod Irvin Excellence in Public Relations Award, to Mary Ellen Miller, an accomplished communications professional who has earned the Accreditation in Public Relations, commonly known as the APR and one of the highest credentials in the business.

Eastman received the Best in Show Award, for an entry in the category of internal communications. Judges chose that project as the top overall entry for its excellence in planning and delivering communications to employees as the company transitioned health savings account providers.

These entities and/or individuals received an Award of Excellence:

- Emory & Henry College received one (in the category of magazines/periodicals);
- The Corporate Image received three (two in newsletters,

SEE DEPARTMENTS, 52



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**DEPARTMENTS, CONTINUED**

- one in media relations);
- Eastman received seven (three in internal communications, two in events, one in video communications, one in collateral/posters); and
- Nuclear Fuel Services received one (in collateral).

The Corporate Image earned three Awards of Quality, followed by one each for Kingsport Chamber of Commerce, Creative Energy and Eastman.

Certificates of Merit were also presented for exceptional work. Tennessee Valley Authority received two of those honors, followed by these entities with one each:

Kingsport Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, Nuclear Fuel Services, Eastman and The Corporate Image.

The evening celebration was capped with the presentation of the Rod Irvin Award to Miller. That award is given to career professionals who have made a significant contribution to the profession of public relations in the Tri-Cities. It is named for the late Rod Irvin, a longtime Eastman spokesman who helped define standards of excellence for public relations and communications professionals in the Tri-Cities.

Tri-Cities Chapter board members and past winners of the Irvin Award chose Miller for her role in establishing the chapter – she is one of the founding members of Tri-Cities PRSA – and her many career achievements. Currently a community relations strategist

for TVA’s Boone Dam Project, Miller gained recognition for being the founder and CEO of MarketingMel, an award-winning communications consulting firm in Johnson City. In addition to communications work with several other entities and non-profits in the Tri-Cities, Miller has long been noted for her outreach to higher education students, especially those at East Tennessee State University and Milligan College. She has been a mentor and lecturer at both schools and funds an annual MarketingMel PR scholarship at ETSU.

“Our chapter is excited to count Mary Ellen Miller among the esteemed professionals who have received our highest award,” said Brad Lifford, president of Tri-Cities PRSA. “When you look at her overall body of work, Mary Ellen has established a career that any professional would do well to model. She continues to be active in our chapter, especially in her outreach to the next generation of communications professionals. She is a valuable advocate for the profession.”

Miller was nominated for the Rod Irvin Award by Nancy Williams, a public relations instructor at Milligan.

“I am truly honored and humbled to be given this award of highest distinction from the Tri-Cities PRSA chapter,” Miller said. “Rod Irvin was a man of great integrity who was always the consummate public relations professional in his leadership roles at Milligan, Eastman and PRSA. He was the first accredited public relations professional from our region. It is indeed an honor to follow in his footsteps. I shall always treasure this award, and I am so grateful to Nancy Williams for nominating me for this chapter’s highest personal honor.”

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# Broken Promises: “Medicare for All”

by Congressman Phil Roe, First District of Tennessee

As a physician, my entire career has been dedicated to caring for patients. I came to Congress because I believed we needed – and still believe we need – health care reform that improves quality and lowers cost. Instead, I watched Democrats ram through the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), making promises they could not keep.



They promised “if you like your health care plan, you can keep it” – which ended up being branded the “Lie of the Year” by Politifact. They also promised you can keep your doctor, but that ended up being a lie as well. They promised having choices of plans and that premiums would go down; however, costs have exploded since 2009 with premiums on the exchange in Tennessee increasing 176 percent over 10 years, leaving 20 percent of consumers only one option for insurance. They predicted 27 million Americans would gain coverage by 2019, but the actual number was only 11.4 million.

Now, Democrats are making a new set of promises as they unveil their so-called “Medicare for All” plan. They claim patients will have no deductibles or premiums; there will be no copays; and it will end preventable deaths. They claim their plan will require no new taxes on the middle class and can be paid for entirely by taxing the wealthy. With their existing track record, we shouldn’t believe a word they say.

Unlike with Obamacare, one promise Democrats are not making this time is that you can keep your plan if you like it. That is because “Medicare for All” bans all private health insurance. This means 180 million people – including 22 million seniors on Medicare Advantage – would lose their health insurance coverage overnight. The American people will have two options: government run health care or no health care. You will no longer have the right to choose your general practitioner, your child’s pediatrician or your gynecologist.

What else would you lose under “Medicare for All”? Just look at countries like the United Kingdom (UK) that have

universal health care. In the UK with a population just over 66 million – about one-fifth the US population of over 327 million – people are waiting months for anything other than the most basic care. There are 4.3 million patients currently on a wait list, with 36,000 waiting over nine months to receive care. Unlike “Medicare for All,” the UK has a private system as well for people to pay for timely care.

To keep public costs down, the UK created the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) to make treatment and coverage decisions, but there is nothing “nice” about this board. President Obama tried to implement a similar board, the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB), in Obamacare – an unelected group of bureaucrats with sweeping powers to “reduce the per capita growth in Medicare spending.” Boards like NICE and the IPAB share the goal of cost reduction – not quality of care. If a treatment saves lives, but costs too much, they will not pay for it. I led the bipartisan effort to repeal the IPAB, which I believe was the worst part of Obamacare, and was grateful President Trump signed the repeal into law.

As Tennesseans, we know how this system will play out. Tennessee made its own attempt at universal health care under TennCare in the 1990s. First implemented in 1994, it promised to lower costs and expand coverage; unfortunately, it only reduced quality of care and nearly bankrupted the state. Once it collapsed, then-Governor Phil Bredesen had to disenroll nearly 200,000 people and slash benefits, not because he wanted to, but because he had to so the state would not go bankrupt. Now TennCare is one of the most restrictive programs in the country, limiting the quantity and quality of medications patients can receive and the doctors they can see.

According to independent estimates, “Medicare for All” will cost at least \$32 trillion over 10 years, an annual amount double our entire federal budget. Even if we doubled all federal individual and corporate taxes, it would still not be enough. We know the plan will cost trillions more. Why? In 1967, Medicare was predicted to cost \$12 billion in 1990, but it actually cost \$110 billion. Medicare is on the path to bankruptcy in 2026 without reform – all before factoring in this plan.

After years of double-digit premium increases, exploding deductibles and costly copays, patient-centered reform has never been needed more. I stand ready to work with my colleagues on real reforms that will preserve the doctor-patient relationship, lower costs and improve quality. **BJ**



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