

# The Business Journal

of Tri-Cities Tennessee / Virginia

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## Blessed by their legacy

2017 YWCA Tribute to Women class features executives, educators and an economic developer



Brenda Barnicki



Tina M. Camper



Mary Margaret Denton



Ruth Moseley King



CeeGee McCord



Susan Reid



Carol Transou



Melody Trimble



Muriel Kagan Zager

**Plus:**  
Cootie Brown's pies in  
the skies plan  
**and**  
Workforce development's  
surprising new player

Tribute to Women honorees photos courtesy YWCA





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## Top Firms: Southeast

Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee

Total revenue: \$1,229.29 million. Average firm growth: 9.47%

The Regional Leaders here had a strong year, with growth higher than in 2015, and a large number of new firms on the list, including this year's single new Top 100 Firm, Kentucky's PYA.



Firm	Headquarters	Rev. \$ mn.	% chg.	Offices	Partners	Professionals	Total emps.	Fee split			
								A&A	Tax	MAS	Other
Dixon Hughes Goodman	Charlotte, N.C.	394.00	12.25	28	155	1,389	1,918	32	33	35	0
Cherry Bekaert	Richmond, Va.	164.20	14.19	12	55	660	901	41	46	10	3
Elliott Davis Decosimo	Greenville, S.C.	125.00	6.84	9	93	522	763	42	44	14	0
LBMC	Brentwood, Tenn.	86.59	5.19	3	45	381	489	23	26	23	28
Aprio	Atlanta	76.32	3.79	2	25	300	378	33	49	13	5
Frazier & Deeter	Atlanta	74.01	10.56	5	16	215	269	35	36	0	29
Mountjoy Chilton Medley	Louisville, Ky.	48.70	12.50	5	43	214	310	37	42	8	13
Mauldin & Jenkins	Atlanta	44.80	-0.33	6	37	180	270	63	30	1	6
PYA	Knoxville, Tenn.	41.62	5.34	5	16	151	235	10	15	75	0
Bennett Thrasher	Atlanta	41.35	14.13	1	34	178	248	31	58	2	9
Smith & Howard	Atlanta	26.05	4.62	1	10	67	101	45	51	4	0
Dean Dorton Allen Ford	Lexington, Ky.	25.61	19.62	2	24	115	165	32	46	22	0
Windham Brannon	Atlanta	25.38	11.95	1	13	125	166	32	54	14	0
VonLehman & Co.	Ft. Wright, Ky.	18.85	6.32	3	18	75	117	43	41	16	0
Porter Keadle Moore	Atlanta	13.31	18.84	1	13	55	80	47	20	33	0
<b>Blackburn, Childers &amp; Steagall</b>	<b>Johnson City, Tenn.</b>	<b>11.80</b>	<b>10.49</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>18</b>
Hancock Askew	Savannah, Ga.	11.70	4.65	3	10	58	83	54	36	9	1

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## cover story

# Nurture, Empower and Transform

The 2017 class of YWCA Tribute to Women recipients includes executives, educators and an economic developer.

Photo courtesy YWCA

Office 423.854.0140  
or 423.979.1300

**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

**Director of Business  
Development and Marketing**  
Jeff Williams  
jwilliams@bjournal.com  
423.202.2240

**Sales & Marketing**  
Buddy Scheerer  
bscheerer@bjournal.com  
423.340.1875

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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# KINGSPORT 100

*Celebrating the Kingsport Spirit* ▶ 2017

## AN UNPRECEDENTED UNDERTAKING

May 2017 marks the 74th anniversary of the first full month of production at the Holston Army Ammunition Plant, or as it was known at the time, Holston Ordnance Works. The plant's genesis was a 1941 call from the National Defense Research Committee to Tennessee Eastman asking if the company could recover anhydride from dilute acetic acid. The chemistry question was the basis for Kingsport's involvement in the production of the RDX explosive compound for the U.S. military for decades to come. Authorization to build the plant came from the NDRC in April 1942. The construction effort utilized so many workers it caused a year-long housing crisis until production began in late April 1943. The photo at right shows an accounting of the construction data for the plant compiled by the builder, Fraser-Brace, courtesy of the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University. For more on Kingsport's centennial, see the city of Kingsport or the Kingsport Chamber of Commerce for a copy of the 68-page Kingsport 100 special publication.

### CONSTRUCTION DATA (Compiled by Fraser-Brace)

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



The employees of TEC Industrial Maintenance & Construction congratulate the City of Kingsport on celebrating 100 years of incorporation. We are proud to have been a part of the Model City for 70 years! Thanks to all who have made our success possible.

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# 2017 healthcare HEROES

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The **25th** annual recognition of the extraordinary individuals and organizations that go above and beyond the call of duty every day.

Healthcare Heroes are the men and women who go above and beyond the call of duty everyday. For more than 20 years, *The Business Journal of Tri-Cities, TN/VA* has honored these heroes on behalf of the business community they serve. Without healthy employees and customers, business cannot survive. Healthcare Heroes keep our region's people and businesses well cared for.

To nominate an individual or organization today, email [news@bjournal.com](mailto:news@bjournal.com) with a letter of recommendation telling what makes them a Healthcare Hero. **Deadline for nominations is the close of business on May 19th.** In addition to recognizing general Healthcare Heroes, five special Cup of Kindness® Awards will be presented from the following categories:

**INNOVATION AWARD:** To a provider whose inventive thinking furthered the delivery of care.

**DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD:** To a provider who has shown leadership and excellent service over a sustained period of time.

**COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD:** To an individual or organization for excellence in public health.

**MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD:** To an individual who has shown excellence in administration.

**SUPPORT SERVICE AWARD:** To a provider for outstanding assistance in the field of health care.

Nominations are judged based on the impact nominees make on the community, the difficulty of their accomplishment, innovation of their work, their leadership qualities and the quality of the nominee's documentation. The 2017 Healthcare Heroes Luncheon will be held on July 21 at the MeadowView Conference Resort & Convention Center.



# My apologies for underestimating the Tennessee General Assembly



I love it when my natural inclination to be pessimistic turns out to be wrong. In this space in February, I posited the notion that the Tennessee General Assembly might not pass the IMPROVE Act (the acronym is for Improving Manufacturing, Public Roads and Opportunities for a Vibrant Economy) because the legislative body, “is full of individuals who make decisions by wetting their

fingers and testing the wind.”

Well, either I underestimated some of those distinguished ladies and gentlemen’s integrity or I discounted the possibility of the wind changing direction. The State House of Representatives passed the bill by a 60-37 margin, with the Senate bill voting in favor 25-6.

On April 26, Governor Bill Haslam signed the IMPROVE Act. It was a political triumph for Haslam, to be sure. He can claim to be the governor who proposed the largest tax cut in Tennessee history (including a 20 percent cut on food). He can point to his responsiveness to business and economic development interests who had asked Tennessee to rededicate itself to providing safe, easily accessed, well-maintained transportation infrastructure. Perhaps most importantly, he can tell companies considering relocation that Tennessee remains a business-friendly state.

The legislation cuts nearly \$300 million in taxes next year and more than \$500 million in taxes annually at its full implementation. The tax cuts include a 20 percent decrease in the sales tax on groceries that equals \$125 million and a \$113 million reduction in business taxes on manufacturers. The legislation also begins an annual cut in the Hall income tax – a tax that is statutorily required to be eliminated by 2022 but previously without a specific schedule to do so.

While those who oppose every tax increase were unhappy to see the cuts mitigated by an increase in the state gas tax, the net effect of increasing that tax will be to fund nearly 1,000 road and bridge projects across all 95 counties. The gas tax increase will be put in place through what the governor’s office refers to as, “a conservative, responsible and user-based approach of raising the

## IMPROVE Funding By County

County	Number of Projects	Estimated Cost to Completion
Carter	28	\$41,265,000
Greene	10	\$274,354,000
Hawkins	13	\$52,020,000
Johnson	5	\$92,477,000
Sullivan	24	\$235,272,000
Unicoi	5	\$4,639,000
Washington	19	\$116,000,000

gas tax by six cents and diesel tax by 10 cents, each over the next three years.” The IMPROVE Act also increases the user fee for electric vehicle owners.

The act prioritizes 962 projects across the state. See the table on this page for the number of projects and projected cost to completion for projects the IMPROVE Act will fund in Northeast Tennessee counties.

For my money, the best part of the IMPROVE Act is that it won’t force Tennessee taxpayers to shoulder the entire burden of upkeep for our roads and bridges alone, as revenue will be captured from both visiting tourists and trucks moving goods through the state.

Finally, the IMPROVE Act continues Tennessee’s history as a pay-as-you-go state, meaning the people who use the roads pay for their upkeep. No new debt will be incurred in the fulfillment of the IMPROVE Act’s promise.

Congratulations to the governor and his staff for coming up with a plan that cuts taxes and provides an equitable solution to the growing infrastructure problem. And apologies to the legislators who saw the sense in it. More than scoring a political triumph, they have shown that government can cut taxes and improve the quality of state services at the same time.

# NETAR: Housing market roars back after one-month slump

By Eric Kistner



The Northeast Tennessee housing market sure turned the idiom that March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb inside out. The final month of the first quarter started on the heels of a lackluster beginning to the year. The region's 21-month string of record-setting year-over-year sales ended in February. At the same time, the average sales price was just plodding along.

But it took a dramatic shift with the March and first quarter Northeast Tennessee Association of Realtors® (NETAR) Trends Report. March

was a big month all the way around. Here's how:

- It was the best March since 2008.
- It boosted the first three months of the year's sales performance enough to make it the best first quarter for single-family homes sales since 2008.
- It was the best first quarter average sales price since 2008.
- It was the eighth-best sales month since 2008.
- March's average sales price was the best year-over-year increase in 12 months.
- During the first three months of 2017, the sales volume of previously owned single-family homes and condominiums totaled a little over \$205 million dollars. That's \$30.4 million more than the first quarter last year.
- First quarter sales accounted for an additional estimated \$57.5 million contribution to the Northeast Tennessee economy. That number is based on research from the National Association of Realtors® focused on how Tennessee's economy is affected by home sales.

March and the Q1 report was the best bundle of economic news for the Tri-Cities region so far this year. And a drill-down on price indicators show some encouraging movement.

The history of price appreciation in the 11 counties monitored by NETAR's Trends Report ranges from 3.5% to 4.5% per year. Here's what we see in the shorter term.

The average listing price began picking up in June last year and continued until September. Then they began cooling off

until February this year when they were up 11%. In March the average was 15% higher than last year.

But a listing price by itself doesn't mean much. What counts is the average sales price. In March, it was 9.3% better than March last year.

The key indicator for this example is the average sales price vs. the average listing price. It has been stable for the past 13 months varying up and down by 1%. What sellers have been getting is 96% of the average listing price.

So, when you combine the increasing average listing price with a stable sales vs. listing price you have price appreciation, and in March it was 5.5% - the best quarter-over-quarter increase in four years. Typically, the second quarter average is better than the first quarter. For the past four years, the increase ranged from 6.7% to 5%.

If history repeats itself, our market will have two solid quarterly average prices by midyear setting the stage for something better than what we saw in 2015 and 2016. But that's a projection based on what has been happening in the past. There could be unforeseen bumps in the road. All the local county housing markets have recovered from the recession, but most are seeing weaker real wage growth than their counterparts. There are also some weak spots in county-level Gross Domestic Product growth, and some economists are scaling back 2017 growth projects. But even with that somber context, home sales and prices are tracking toward a good second quarter.

Another plus is interest rates have dropped to the lowest level of the year boosting housing affordability. Yes, inventory is still tight, but it has improved. During March, we had 7.3 months of inventory, so buyers have more choice than they had had since April last year.

With March roaring out like a lion the stage is set for a better peak buying and selling season here in Northeast Tennessee. The swing in the market between February and March demonstrates the need to hire a Realtor whether you are buying or selling real estate. Realtors have unparalleled knowledge of local market conditions, and they will leverage that expertise to help their clients reach their real estate goals.

*Eric Kistner is the 2017 president of the Northeast Tennessee Association of Realtors. The real estate education and trade group is the voice for real estate in the Tri-Cities and has more than 1,200 local Realtor members and more than 100 affiliates.*

# Ups & Downs

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



Cutline



**Congress** - Congress? Yep. Never thought we'd be happy to see yet another continuing resolution keeping the government running, but it sure beats the alternatives. The legislative branch managed to avoid both another government shut-down battle and, potentially worse, serious debate over the Trump administration's budget documents. One economic developer told *The Business Journal* on condition of anonymity, "if that budget had gone through, with the elimination of community block grants, the dismantling of the Appalachian Regional Commission, and some of the other things in there, we'd be seeing local and state government officials marching on Washington." It was sad to watch Congressmen Roe and Griffith have to tell business leaders last month that the Trump budget would never pass. If that's the case, then why bother with the kabuki of sending it to Capital Hill in the first place?



**Winning some** - HSN, formerly known as Home Shopping Network, is investing just short of \$10 million and plans to hire 165 employees at its Piney Flats location. NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership CEO Clay Walker made the announcement at his organization's April board meeting. The company eschewed a formal announcement. The HSN move continues a trend of increasing employment in the county.



**Losing some** - Last month we said on our Table of Contents, "Maybe Exide can succeed in Bristol after all." Then again, maybe not. The battery maker was rushed into making an announcement that it was considering restarting operations with 40 employees last month after *The Bristol Herald Courier* ran a story citing local residents' environmental concerns. On April 26, the Herald Courier was again first to the story, noting Exide has withdrawn its permit application for the Bristol restart.



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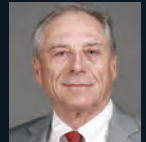
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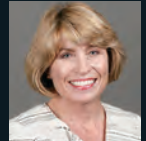
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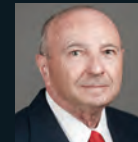
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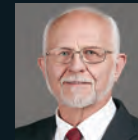
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The current and future Roan Scholars pose as six of the eight members of the class of 2021 join the existing Roan Scholars prior to the Roan Reception.

East Tennessee State University held the annual Roan Reception April 28 at the Reece Museum, honoring the graduating scholars and welcoming the class of 2021. Eight students will encompass the incoming class. All were selected based on criteria including character, intellectual curiosity, physical vigor and leadership skills. In addition, said Scott Jeffress, director of the program, "We seek those students with not just the greatest capacity to excel as leaders but who also possess an unquenchable desire and drive to pursue excellence and to make a positive impact on the world around them."



Betty DeVinney and Steve Darden



Ben Daugherty and Matt Wilhelm



Dr. Brian Noland, Sharon Boles, Connor McClelland and Louie Gump Photos courtesy ETSU Photographic Services



Noland, Boles, Tiffany Cook and Gump



Lottie Ryans and Ruth Moseley King



Susan Reid and Muriel Kagan Zager



The Bristol Train Station was filled to capacity for the event.

The 2017 YWCA Tribute to Women was held April 27 at the Bristol Train Station. Nine women from the Tri-Cities region were honored in categories listed as "Nurture," "Empower," and "Transform." Honorees included Brenda Barnicki, Tina Camper, Mary Margaret Denton, Ruth Moseley King, CeeGee McCord, Susan Reid, Carol Transou, Melody Trimble and Muriel Kagan Zager. Sponsors included Strongwell, The United Company Foundation, Wells Fargo, BTES, Eastman Credit Union, HomeTrust Bank, First Tennessee Bank, J.A. Street & Associates, Wellmont Health System, *The Bristol Herald-Courier*, *Voice Magazine for Women* and *The Business Journal of Tri-Cities, TN/VA*.



Ryans with Melody Trimble



Sharon Boles and CeeGee McCord share a moment of friendship.



Kathy Waugh and Elliott Moore



The 2017 class of Tribute to Women Award recipients: (Back row, L-R) Brenda Barnicki, Ruth Moseley King, Melody Trimble, Susan Reid, Carol Transou, (Front row, L-R) Tina Camper, Mary Margaret Denton, Muriel Kagan Zager and CeeGee McCord Photo courtesy YWCA

## YWCA fetes 2017 Tribute to Women Award recipients

By Scott Robertson

**T**he 2017 class of Tribute to Women Award recipients includes several women who have made an impact on the Tri-Cities business community, from entrepreneurs and executives to an economic developer, as well as an educator, a journalist and not-for-profit administrators. Nine women were honored April 27 at a dinner at the Bristol Train Station.

The annual Tribute to Women awards program recognizes the outstanding achievements of individuals throughout the greater Tri-Cities region. Nominated by area organizations and chosen by an independent panel of judges, the nine award recipients exemplify those working to enrich the region and were honored in categories which reflect the impact of the YWCA in the region: Nurture, Empower, and Transform.

Lottie Ryans, 2017 Tribute to Women Chair, says, "The women honored this year through Tribute to Women demonstrate the power and effect a determined woman can have on a community, an industry, or an organization but equally important, an individual life. These outstanding people have empowered their colleagues, nurtured those in need of assistance, and transformed this region with their pursuit of excellence. We, and

generations to come, are truly blessed by their legacy."

The 2017 Tribute to Women Award recipients were selected for their leadership qualities, positive impact on community, and demonstrated growth and achievement. In paraphrasing a song from a popular Broadway musical, Ryans said to the recipients, "Because of you the region has been changed for the better. Because of you the region has been changed for good."

### The 2017 recipients

Educator **Carol Transou** dedicated her career as an educator to creatively bringing the past to life for her students. She volunteered to teach some of the first racially integrated classes in Chattanooga, TN. Later she organized groups of high school students to take school trips to Europe in the summers, inspired by the gift of such a trip provided by her grandmother. Following her retirement, she became an advocate for women and girls and she was instrumental in launching the Women's Fund of the East Tennessee Foundation where she serves on the boards of several funds. She is a past Tennessee Teacher of the Year (1987) and was inducted in the Tennessee Women's Hall of Fame in 2015.

The Philosopher's Sunday School Class of Munsey Memorial United Methodist Church nominated Transou.

Children's advocate **Mary Margaret Denton's** "fearless dedication to hard work has enriched the community", according to her nominating organization, the Children's Advocacy Center of Sullivan County. Holding a variety of volunteer and professional roles, including board president and clinical director, Denton has served children throughout her 47-year career as a social worker, counselor, and leader. Her stops along the way include stints with the Holston United Methodist Home for Children, national board of directors for the National Children's Alliance, and the Children's Advocacy Center. She is recipient of the Leadership Kingsport Alumni award. Currently she serves on the board of directors of the Wellmont Foundation and of Kingsport Emergency Communications.

Throughout her tenure at United Way of Southwest Virginia, **Tina Camper** has committed to serving the residents of 15 counties reached by her organization. Nurturing the growth of this United Way chapter has directly improved the health, education, and financial stability of the families served by the agency and its partners. In addition to her duties as Director of Administration, Camper is co-owner of a busy tourism recreation business, is completing a second associate's degree at Liberty University, and participates in the Harvard University ManageMentor Program. More than 1,000 students benefit each weekend from her leadership of the Backpacks Unite food program for low-income children.

Gourmet chocolatier, **Brenda Barnicki** has founded and grown a thriving business with a social mission, Bellafina Chocolates. A former Fortune 500 executive, Barnicki made a mid-career shift with the goal of developing a business that would empower women recovering from addiction, incarceration, and abuse while providing funds to support children's charities. Her work has been recognized by the Newman's Own Foundation, and received two KOSBE small business awards.

Veteran journalist, author, and Middle East expert, **Muriel Kagan Zager**, became one of the very first women to cover Israel and other countries of the region, including Iran and Lebanon. She overcame cultural biases to develop human interest stories for the *Bristol Herald Courier*, and a column for the *Washington County News*. Her experiences inspired five novels, including *The Faithful*, which was a National Book Award nominee. Since her husband's death she has written about her journey as a widow, inspiring and empowering numerous women coping with their own loss. A philanthropist, Zager, endowed an annual lecture series for diversity at East Tennessee State University, and sponsors a program in Holocaust Studies at Emory & Henry College.

**Susan Reid**, executive director of the First Tennessee Development District, has dedicated her 43-year career building a non-partisan, regionally-focused organization which has leveraged the cooperation of 20 municipalities and eight counties to develop projects resulting in everything from clean drinking water, to comprehensive care for seniors, to addressing the

regional epidemic of opioid abuse. She is a board member of the Appalachian Regional Commission, and a recipient of the Tennessee Valley Corridor's "Corridor Champion Award", among many others. She is the longest serving and was the first female executive director of a development district in Tennessee.


Eastman Director of Global Public Affairs and Vice President of the Board of the Eastman Foundation, **CeeGee McCord**, is known as an inclusive leader who insists all voices be heard. Her efforts have broadened Eastman's worldwide philanthropy and created the infrastructure for community partnerships in locations where Eastman has operations. She is known throughout the community for her leadership and volunteer roles with the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce, Kingsport Chamber Board, East


Tennessee State University, and Milligan College among others, and this past year has chaired the Kingsport 100 centennial committee. She has been named a Champion of Education by the Kingsport City Schools, and, together with her husband, was honored as a Champion of Youth by the Kingsport Boys and Girls Club. She is one of just 35 members of the 2016-2017 Leadership Tennessee Class.

A nurse, and seasoned healthcare administrator, **Melody Trimble** is Vice-President at Mountain States Health Alliance. She supervises four hospitals as CEO, including the region's only children's hospital, and the region's only psychiatric

hospital. Trimble is an active community volunteer, serving on the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce, Washington County, TN Economic Development Council, and the Hospital Alliance of Tennessee. Among other achievements, she was named as CEO of the Year by the Arkansas Auxiliary, when she was market CEO for Sparks Health System in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Trimble is known for her devotion to delivering on patient care and quality improvement goals, inspiring and mentoring young leaders, and empowering her team.

A lifelong devotion to her community and six decades of transformational leadership earned **Ruth Moseley King** the nomination of the Blue Stocking Club of Bristol. Multiple generations have benefited from her professional contributions to the field of education at Sullins College for young women, and then transforming it into the Sullins School, which continues to thrive fifty years later. Her service to the YMCA of Bristol resulted in an outreach program to teach young people to swim. King's efforts in the arts have supported live classical music through the Paramount Chamber Players, as well as the transformation of the Paramount Theatre itself. Finally, King was directly involved in the revitalization of State Street into the thriving downtown destination it is now as the proprietor of Ruth King Antiques, which she ran while mentoring and encouraging other downtown business owners.

The 2017 Tribute to Women banquet and silent auction raised funds to support the mission of YWCA Bristol including efforts to increase the economic empowerment of women and families, promote women's health and safety, and to support racial justice and civil rights. 

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- Lottie Ryans, Tribute to Women chair



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40 Under Forty honorees will be featured in the December issue of The Business Journal.

Deadline for nominations is July 26, 2017. Nominate online at [40under.com](http://40under.com)



Ira Stone of MiniFibers, (right) discusses broadband with Eric Ogle of Magellan Advisors, working on behalf of the Johnson City Power Board. Photos courtesy JCPB

## Johnson City Power Board polling potential broadband business customers

By Scott Robertson

The Johnson City Power Board (soon to be changing its name to the Johnson City Energy Authority Board) is in the process of conducting an intensive survey of its business and residential users in order to ascertain their broadband needs. Magellan Advisors is doing the legwork for the board, speaking with business clients directly and promoting an online survey for residential customers.

“Normally this study would take Magellan six months,” says Jeff Dykes, JCPB CEO. “We requested they turn it around in three. They have brought in additional folks to do meetings and visit with our customers.”


The board has taken its time in the past, considering a joint venture with BVU three years ago before deciding against it, then putting together its own business plan for a hybrid system to offer broadband connectivity using the 167 miles of high-count fiber already in place along with a wireless element.

But the board wanted to be completely sure it was making the most prudent decision possible, so it put its plans on hold for a few more months in order to let Magellan, which has conducted similar studies around the world, including the Tennessee Valley, study the situation and report back, Dykes says.

“So once Magellan completes the feasi-

bility study, and that should be prior to our July board meeting, they will do a presentation for the board,” Dykes says. “They will say, ‘here are some viable options and here are some costs.’ They will also show the financial models so we can see if we would get a viable return – is it a viable model that doesn’t put the utility at risk and doesn’t put the customers at risk. That will be key for us.”

“We’ve been looking at a hybrid system of wireless and fiber,” Dykes reiterates. “They may be able to expand on that and show us what it would look like on a larger scale. They’ll help us with timelines. That way when our board makes a decision, they will be able to say, ‘We are making the best decision based on all the information available.’ For us, it’s bringing in the experts in the field. That allows us to say, ‘We have looked at every option possible.’”

Dykes says it’s too early to put a timeline on service rollouts. Once Magellan makes its presentation, the board will choose an option with which to move forward. The timeline from there on depends at least in part on which option the board chooses. 



Jeff Dykes,  
JCPB CEO

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# Pies in the sky: Cootie Brown's Internet gambit

By Scott Robertson and Collin Brooks

On April 26, as the Johnson City Public Building Authority was considering whether to enter into negotiations with one of three entities (the Chamber of Commerce Serving Johnson City, Jonesborough and Washington County, Cootie Brown's or Purple Cow) to build on a vacant lot along State of Franklin Road across from the ETSU parking garage, Cootie Brown's owner Tony Vella offered a sweetener. In addition to operating a restaurant that would provide the PBA \$34,000 annually in tax revenue, Vella said, his company plans to sell key lime pies online nationwide, with projected gross revenues of \$49 million, and all the sales tax will be generated at the State of Franklin address.

Eyebrows were raised and most PBA members said they wanted more concrete information, but agreed that prolonging the process to allow that information to be gathered would not be fair to the other parties involved.

PBA Chair Dr. Jon Smith encouraged board members to not take into the account of collecting the revenue from the pies, because it wasn't a solid and concrete number, yet. "When we make decisions, we've got to make them based on concrete, or at least nearly concrete, prospects," he said. "And Tony is not this way, but I have run into people that have pitched some of the greatest ideas to me ever, and I am still waiting for some of them to happen. I don't mean to be facetious, but we need to limit ourselves to what is in the near term and practical."

In the end, Cootie Brown's won the right to negotiate for the property. And while PBA members said the literal pie-in-the-sky revenue figure for online pie sales didn't enter into their decision (Cootie Brown's restaurant alone projects to generate \$3,000 per annum more than Purple Cow would have and almost \$12,000 more than the chamber), Vella's announcement has created quite the buzz.

The company has spent a year in research and development of the shipping container for the pies, Vella said. "We have been working on developing a container that we can use to ship our pies in. We had a container company create a con-



Tony Vella poses with Cootie Brown's key lime pie delivery container at Lot 8 on State of Franklin Road in Johnson City. Photo by Collin Brooks

tainer that can hold dry ice top and bottom and can lock the pie in place so it can't move or be destroyed in shipping. These pies have to be shipped frozen or very well refrigerated."

Once the box was created, the company set to shipping pies around the nation with thermometers in the containers. When the pies arrived at their destinations, the recipients sent pictures back to Johnson City showing the temperature and state of the product. That R&D process is ongoing, Vella said after the PBA meeting. "I can ship one frozen to California, but if I ship one to Memphis it's 60 degrees," he said. "I'm thinking they put it on a plane and fly it straight out to California, but they may drive it to Memphis. So we're still going through that process, but we should be ready by 90 days from now, ready to sell the first one online."

"I'm going to sell a million of these pies, I guarantee it," Vella said. "And I am going to use this address to process the sale. The back office building will be my home office for Cootie Brown's Pies and Dessert."

The pies will sell for about \$49 apiece and Vella was adamant that he would sell a million a year. "If y'all don't think I'll sell a million of these, then you would have never thought that Cootie Brown's would be in business today," said Vella, who also told the PBA his new location won't hurt sales at the existing Cootie Brown's location on North Roan Street. "I count the cars that drive away because that parking lot is full," Vella said. "This city can support two Cootie Brown's just like it can support more than one McDonald's or more than one of any number of restaurants." BJ

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Mitch Miller (far left) addresses NeTREP members including Tyler Engle, executive director at Joint Economic Development Board of Unicoi County; Jon Hartman, planning and economic development director for the city of Elizabethton; and Mike Housewright, city recorder for the town of Unicoi.

## NeTREP counties already working together on economic development

By Scott Robertson

When tourism coordinator Kayla Carter called to order the Carter County, Tennessee Accommodation Summit at Roan Mountain State Park on the afternoon of April 25, most of the faces you'd expect to find were in attendance. There was Dave Jones, regional director from the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development. There was Alicia Phelps, executive director of the Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association.

But right next to them was Mitch Miller, who until the recent formation of the Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership, would have been as out of place as a McDonald's on a mountaintop. Miller is CEO of the Washington County Economic Development Council.



Promotional materials for Elizabethton Day-Cations and Small Business Week in Elizabethton are being distributed throughout the NeTREP area and beyond.



His presence at the Carter County event is just one sign of the burgeoning cooperative economic development between Carter, Unicoi and Washington counties known by the somewhat unwieldy acronym NeTREP. "A big part of the economic opportunity for this region deals with outdoor recreation," Miller told the operators of tourist accommodations in Carter County. "Carter and Unicoi counties have so much to offer beyond just pad-ready sites for industrial development."

"Take where we are right now, for instance," Miller said. "Roan Mountain State Park. Places like this are very attractive for the Millennial generation to come here and enjoy what makes this place

special – to fill a job, say, at NN Inc., and be less than 30 minutes away from something as beautiful as Roan Mountain or Beauty Spot in Unicoi County.”

“So we’re focused on unifying our approach because at the end of the day we can all relate to jobs, and we all understand there are a lot of assets in this community tied to the outdoors and recreation.” Lest one get the idea that NeTREP is only about trails and bike paths, though, it’s important to go back earlier in the day to an event hours before the Accommodation Summit. In Johnson City that morning, the NeTREP staff meeting was the forum for discussions on everything from Elizabethton’s Small Business Week promotion to the strategic planning process for Erwin, the town of Unicoi and Unicoi County to the pending completion of the Mountain Harvest Food Kitchen.

The staff also compared notes on a scheduled “field trip” to Blue Ridge, Ga., a community that, much like Unicoi County, takes significant economic benefit from the growth and sale of apples and apple products. The difference is that the Mercier Orchards in Blue Ridge have become a multi-million dollar tourism driver that buoys communities around it.

Finally, the staff discussed the upcoming Talent Connect initiative, scheduled for August 17-20. The initiative brings together engineering and finance students from 28 universities across the southeastern United States to meet with companies and young professionals groups in Northeast Tennessee. The idea is that once those students see what the region has to offer, at least some of them will want to come back and pursue careers with companies here.

“Since this is happening during race week,” Miller said, “I’ll be



Kayla Carter, coordinator, Carter County Tourism

reaching out to NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership to see if we can participate in the Red Carpet Tour they’ll be doing at Bristol Motor Speedway. I think it would be great if we could make the point to the site consultants who will be there that Northeast Tennessee is not only a great place to do business, it’s a place where we work to ensure the companies they represent will have a talented workforce year after year.”

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Patrick Wilson and David Jones discuss runway repair work.  
Photo by Scott Robertson

## Aerospace Park continues ascent

By Scott Robertson

The Tri-Cities Airport Authority continues to move ahead with its plan to create a business/industrial park for aeronautical companies. In its April 20 meeting, the authority unanimously voted to approve the expenditure of \$82,000 to conduct a federally mandated environmental assessment of the land for Aerospace Park.

The authority also approved an agreement with Raymond James & Associates, which works with local governments including Washington County, on bond issues. The company helped that county's government achieve a \$19.5 million savings in what amounted to a \$130 million refinancing of bonds in 2016.

### General Assembly: TRI can bond park

Legislation to allow the Tri-Cities Airport Authority to issue bonds backed by the full faith and credit of the governments of Johnson City, Kingsport, Bristol, Sullivan County and Washington County passed both houses of the Tennessee General Assembly and was signed by Governor Bill Haslam in April. Each of those local governments must formally approve such a plan before it can move forward, but the state action was a necessary first step.

The airport authority seeks the ability to issue those bonds in order to fund creation of Aerospace Park. The airport is roughly \$17 million away from being able to grade the land on the south side of the main runway and provide infrastructure for that project.

Aerospace Park is the brand the airport authority has given to its plan to turn 160 acres of fallow ground on the south side of the main runway into an industrial/business park for aerospace-based firms. The park would leverage not only the fact that the land represents the only Select Tennessee Certified development

with direct airfield access, but also its proximity to Northeast State Community College for workforce training, a foreign-trade zone and on-site Customs.

### \$280,000 in runway repair needed


Some shuffling of funds will be necessary to fund repairs necessitated by a hollowing of karst beneath the runway. "I've been here 30 years and it seems like every year there's another sinkhole somewhere," said Dan Mahoney, who chaired the April 13 Airfield Development Committee meeting in the absence of Ken Maness.

"It's not a sinkhole yet," clarified David Jones, director of operations. "But this is my fourth under the runway. We had six under Taxiway Romeo."

"When we did the major rehab on the main runway in 2013, we installed additional edge drains along the runway to help alleviate these issues," said Patrick Wilson, airport director, "but this problem could have been developing well before that."

"Those other drains were about three feet deep along the edges," Jones added. "We were putting grout in 50 feet deep in a couple of spots. That's fairly deep for a pavement section that's about two feet of pavement and subgrade down four or five feet maybe."

"Well, we could blame it on the TVA," Mahoney joked, referring to the five-to-seven year project the federal utility is managing to address a much larger problem with karst at nearby Boone Dam. "Everybody else around here is blaming things on them."

"We share a little of their pain," Wilson said, "but we're not at that level." 



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# Emory & Henry receives \$1 million business chair endowment

## College announces \$80 million fundraising campaign

By Scott Robertson



Kyra Bishop (above left), Gary Reedy and Bill Pendleton are Tri-chairs of the Ascend campaign. Photos courtesy Emory & Henry College

One never knows how long one's impact on others will last. The inspiration for gifts of more than \$1 million to Emory & Henry College, for instance, began over 100 years ago, said James Curtis "Curt" Hughes, nephew of Dr. Kathryn Burke Greever whose philanthropy recently made possible two endowed funds at Emory & Henry College.

Greever, a 1951 Emory & Henry graduate and associate professor emerita at West Virginia University, comes from a family that believes in "experiential learning" as evidenced by the establishment of The Dr. Kathryn Burke Greever Chair in Business and The Elbert and Mae Comer Burke Family Endowed Scholarship.

"Grandfather believed that to succeed in life you have to do things your way and learn from your experience," said Hughes, who spoke at a signing ceremony at the College on April 24. "Grandfather led by

example." Hughes' wife, Lyle Hughes, and their daughter, Allyson Virden, also represented the family during the ceremony.

Endowed with an initial \$1 million, the fund for The Dr. Kathryn Burke Greever Chair in Business will generate proceeds that will help underwrite the faculty chair holder's salary and provide funds for that professor to undertake outstanding research as well as pursue initiatives to strengthen the College's business program.

The Elbert and Mae Comer Burke Family Endowed Scholarship, with an initial gift of \$148,000, memorializes Greever's parents who were residents of Southwest Virginia. Proceeds from the fund will be awarded to financially needy students, with first preference given to female students from Russell, Washington and Smyth counties in Virginia.

Greever was born in Beckley, West Virginia and grew up in Southwest

## Goals of the Ascend Campaign

### The Ampersand Advantage, \$3 million (integrative learning platform)

- Project Counseling and Resources
- Internships and Institutes
- Community Service Opportunities
- Alumni Mentoring Program
- E-Portfolio
- Ampersand Day

### Engaged Living & Learning, \$3 million

- Appalachian Center for Civic Life
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Honors Program
- Intercollegiate Athletics
- International Education Program
- Powell Resource Center
- Spiritual Life
- Student Life and Support Services
- WEHC Radio Station

### Academic Programs, \$10 million

- Endowed Chairs and Professorships
- Scholarships and Financial Aid
- Undergraduate and Graduate Student Support
- A New Center for Global Studies

### Living-Learning Environment; a Growth Agenda, \$55 million

- School of Health Sciences Construction
- King Athletic Center Renovation/Expansion
- Library Renovation
- College Fitness Facility
- Van Dyke Center Refurbishment
- New/Renovated Residence Halls
- Marching Band Building
- Duck Pond Rebuild w/Founders Plaza
- Sustainability/Technology/Repair

### Operations, \$9 million

- Emory & Henry Fund
- Emory & Henry athletics

Virginia. Following her graduation from Virginia Intermont Preparatory School in Bristol, Va., Greever completed a B.A. at Emory & Henry in just three years, majoring in economics, education and psychology. Currently residing in Morgantown, W. Va., Greever earned an Ed.D. from West Virginia University and served at the University as a professor in the College of Education and Human Services until her retirement in 1997, when she was named associate professor emerita.

### College launches campaign

Just after announcing those endowments, the college announced the public phase of an \$80 million fundraising campaign, an initiative designed to strengthen the student experience at the 180-year-old institution. The college says the campaign, dubbed Ascend, will fund scholarships, enhance facilities, embrace technology, enable faculty and enrich the student experience.

Since 2014, the campaign has raised \$60 million to date during the "silent" phase. As it moves into the public phase, progress in several areas is evident, most significantly with the growth of the School of Health Sciences at the E&H Marion Campus and the development of Ampersand, an innovative, experiential approach to learning.

Funding will also be provided for scholarships, faculty support, athletic facilities renewal/expansion, Kelly Library renovation, new fitness facility, Civic Innovation Institute,



James Curtis Hughes, donor Representative and family member and Emory & Henry President Jake Schrum shake hands after signing the Kathryn Burke Greever endowment agreement.

Center for Global Studies and more.

Gary Reedy, Emory & Henry alumnus and CEO of the American Cancer Society and Bill Pendleton, managing member of PEN Investments chair the Ascend Campaign. **BJ**



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# Milligan dedicates engineering college facilities

By Scott Robertson

Area business leaders joined the Milligan College community April 28 for the dedication of the college's new engineering facilities, a major component of the college's recent efforts to expand its academic offerings and a step toward completion of the largest fundraising initiative in the college's 150-year history.

Local corporations made some of the latest campaign gifts to support the college's engineering program. At the ceremony, Milligan President Dr. Bill Greer dedicated four engineering labs named for Eastman, NN Inc., Nuclear Fuel Services Inc., and TPI Corporation. Greer also honored Ruth Myers of Cincinnati, Ohio, who made a \$1 million lead gift for the program in 2014.

Greer explained that Milligan began more than five years ago to develop its plans to add mechanical and electrical engineering majors in response to both student and corporate interest. The plans included securing the financial, physical and human resources necessary to launch the program with Milligan's usual high quality standards. "Today's dedication is the culmination of those efforts," Greer said. "We're grateful for the significant partnerships with these locally-



Bob Hart, Etta Clark, Dr. Bill Greer, Chrissy Idlette and CeeGee McCord commemorate the opening of the Eastman engineering lab on the campus of Milligan College April 28.

based corporations who have committed significant resources to ensure that our program will produce high quality, ready-to-work engineers. Their commitment to Christian higher education is a testament of their dedication to this region and its people. And we're very pleased now to dedicate these laboratories in honor of these corporate partners."

Launched in fall 2016, the four-year engineering program is fully offered on the Milligan campus in Northeast Tennessee. It is currently the only such program within a two-hour radius of the Tri-Cities, though other schools are working to put engineering programs in place. [B]

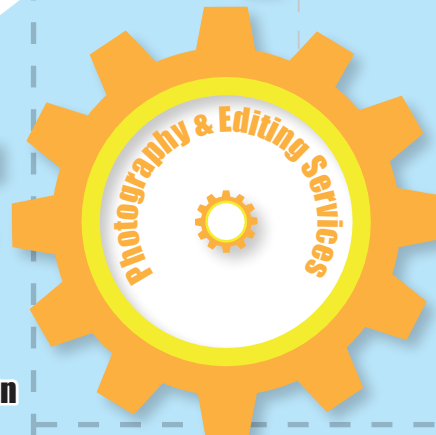
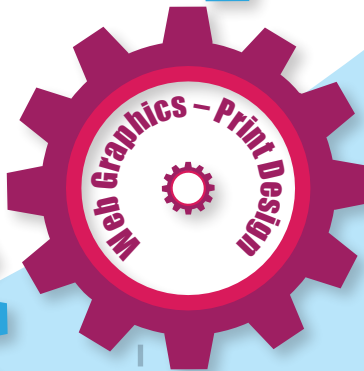
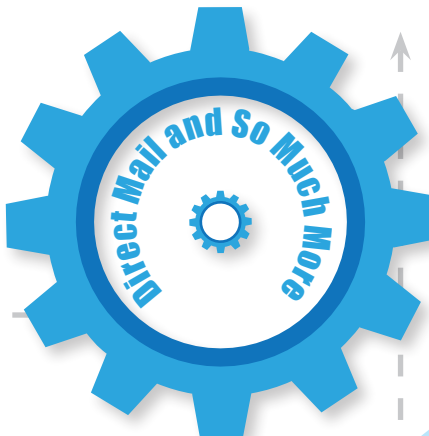


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# Operation Tomorrow's Workforce

By Scott Robertson



Steve Smith



Travis Staton



Alan Levine

The relationship between the United Way and the business community in America has generally followed a simple model: businesses support the United Way, through encouraging employees to contribute to fund drives and through allowing employees to take time away from the office to volunteer. The United Way of Southwest Virginia is adding a facet to that model. That organization is starting a focused, deliberate drive to make a positive impact on the workforce available to the business community in the region.

Because the United Way of Southwest Virginia serves 13 counties and two cities, it traditionally focuses efforts on improving the health, education, and financial stability of all people in the region. That won't change, President and CEO Travis Staton said, but the organization will bring those efforts to bear specifically on workforce issues. "United Way of Southwest Virginia operates on an initiative-based community impact model, meaning we take a specific problem in the community and focus funding and efforts to address that problem. We foster collaborations with businesses, non-profits, and community leaders to produce more targeted, focused outcomes

and measurable, long-lasting results. We understand that it takes everyone uniting for the same cause to make the most impact on our region's workforce."

Staton added, "While our unemployment rate continues to be the highest in the state and the need for job growth is a regional focus, the fact that so many young people are not pursuing education or entering the workforce is having far-reaching negative impacts on our region's workforce and economic vitality."

There is a gap between the worlds of learning and work in our region. Research from the Virginia Department of Education shows us that less than half of high school graduates in Southwest Virginia go on to further their education; according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2015, in Southwest Virginia, around 3,800 16-24 year olds were not in school or working; yet employers need to fill open positions.

Steve Smith, President and CEO of K-VA-T Food Stores, which operates Food City, said, "As an employer, we experience the challenge of filling some of the job openings within our company."

United Way of Southwest Virginia's cradle-to-

SEE **WORKFORCE**, 28



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**WORKFORCE, CONTINUED**

career vision concentrates resources on improving outcomes related to creating a strong workforce of the future. Public and private leadership know that cradle-to-career investments made now – with strategic programs, services, and partnerships – will positively impact the economic development of Southwest Virginia and the future workforce.

Initiatives new to United Way of Southwest Virginia in 2017 include a Careers Expo for Youth with an expected attendance of more than 4,000 students, and the Operation Tomorrow's Workforce breakfast for area leaders in September.

Between now and the September breakfast and expo, the organization will be conducting outreach efforts throughout the region, including a series of articles to appear in *The Business Journal* exploring the current challenges in Southwest Virginia's workforce. We'll share the stories of local workers and discuss topics that specifically affect our workforce in Southwest Virginia such as local livable-wage jobs, local innovation, the value of working at an early age, the uniqueness of the community college system, and combining passion with skill, to name a few.

In September, Smith, Alan Levine, President and CEO of Mountain States Health Alliance, and Staton will convene top cross-sector leaders from the localities of Bland, Buchanan,

Carroll, Dickenson, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, and Wise, and the cities of Galax and Norton for the Operation Tomorrow's Workforce breakfast. The breakfast is an invitation-only event focused on bridging the gap between the worlds of learning and work, and inviting other community leaders to be a part of the solution.

Said Levine, "Steve, Travis, and I are ready to discuss the current workforce issues faced by Southwest Virginia, the power of a cradle-to-career approach, and the introduction of a new, community-changing opportunity to form actionable partnerships that will strengthen tomorrow's workforce."

The last article will recap the Operation Tomorrow's Workforce breakfast, and will provide an overview of the actions being taken to bridge the gap between the worlds of learning and work in the region.

"In a few short years, today's students will be tomorrow's workforce," Staton said. "We need to invest in our region's students. If Southwest Virginia is going to thrive, we cannot allow the loss of the great potential we have in our young people — our next generation of game changers and problem solvers. As a father of four young children, I am committed to seeing our region thrive, not just for their future, but for all our children. **B**



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## ON THE MOVE

Food City recently named **Stephen Spangler** vice president of Real Estate. Spangler succeeds long-time Food City veteran, Louis Scudere, who recently retired from the company after 31 years of dedicated service.

"Stephen is a seasoned professional who has excelled in his role since he joined our company several years ago," says Steve Smith, Food City president and chief executive officer. "He's developed strong relationships throughout our region and has tremendous leadership ability."

Spangler joined the Food City team in 2011, accepting a position as real estate manager and was later promoted to director of Real Estate for the company. His new responsibilities entail the oversight of the company's strategic real estate initiatives including market analysis, site selection, acquisitions and site development, leasing, dispositions and portfolio management, as well as the day-to-day administration of the organization's diverse group of real estate holdings.

"I am honored to have been selected to serve in this capacity for the K-VA-T organization and to be able to continue to represent a company that is committed, in so many positive ways, to every community in which it locates," Spangler says. "I look forward to this opportunity to provide ongoing support, from a real estate perspective, to the company's overall operational objectives."

Prior to joining the Food City team, Spangler served as a development officer for a large multifamily development company located in Charleston, S.C., managing residential real estate development projects valued in excess of \$40 million.

He also previously served as development manager for a commercial development firm based in Bristol Va., where he was responsible for the oversight of commercial development projects throughout the Southeastern United States.

Spangler has participated in various community/fundraising initiatives including the Muscular Dystrophy Association Lock Up Campaign & Read Across America. He was inducted into *The*



Stephen Spangler

*Business Journal of Tri-Cities, TN/VA's* prestigious 40 Under Forty class of 2013 for rising business professionals. Spangler is a 2002 graduate of The Citadel in Charleston, S.C., with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration and a 2011 graduate of King College, obtaining a Master of Business Administration Degree, with a concentration in Finance.

Food City recently announced the appointment of **Mickey Blazer** to the newly combined position of executive vice president of Pharmacy and Fuel Operations. Blazer brings more than 40 years of industry knowledge and experience to the position, including six years in pharmacy management.

Blazer began his retail career shortly after graduating high school. He has served in numerous positions during his employment with Food City, including general merchandise manager, produce manager, meat cutter, assistant store manager, HBC/GM supervisor/area trainer, store manager, district manager, pharmacy operations manager, director of pharmacy operations, vice president of pharmacy operations, and most recently, executive vice president of operations for Food City's Knoxville based division.

"As we continue to grow and expand, these two vital components are key to our continued success. Mickey has a tremendous amount of experience in both store and pharmacy operations, which make him the perfect candidate for this newly created position. He is a true asset to our company and the community as a whole, and we couldn't be more pleased to announce this much deserved promotion," says Steven C. Smith, Food City president and chief executive officer.

Blazer's new duties consist of the oversight of both fuel and pharmacy operations for the entire 134-store supermarket chain, which includes 101 pharmacies and 95 fuel/convenience stores. "I feel fortunate to work for a company where I have had so many opportunities to advance in my career. I look forward to the challenge of this new role and for the opportunity to play such a



Mickey Blazer

SEE **DEPARTMENTS, 32**



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**DEPARTMENTS, CONTINUED**

vital part in the future success of our company,” says Blazer.

Blazer also maintains a strong commitment to the education of area youth, having served as secretary/treasurer, vice president and president of his local Optimist Clubs. He served as president of the Morristown Plaza Merchants Association for three years and three years as chairman for the East Tennessee Grocers and Convenience Stores Golf Tournament, the proceeds of which fund college scholarships. In 2011, he was inducted into the Tennessee Grocers “Hall of Eagles”, in recognition of his support and dedication to the Tennessee Grocers Education Foundation. Blazer also served on the Governor of Virginia’s Prescription Drug and Heroin Task Force Subcommittee. He is actively involved with the American Diabetes Association as well, where he served as the 2014 Chairman for the Diabetes Step-Out Walk.

**Jody Harnsberger** has joined First Citizens Bank in Johnson City as business and commercial support specialist. Harnsberger will assist the market executive, specializing in business and commercial banking. Harnsberger is a native of Florida and resides in Kingsport. She has 29 years of banking experience in the Tri-Cities market. Prior to joining First Citizens Bank, she served as the executive assistant to the Johnson City president for TriSummit Bank. Harnsberger has been involved in the community with United Way, Voices of the Mountains, Theatre Bristol and Blountville Community Chest.



Jody Harnsberger

**AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS**

**Quesenberry, JA Street among top honorees at AGC Awards**

The Tri-Cities Branch of The Associated General Contractors of Tennessee announced the winners of the 25th Annual Excellence Awards at its awards dinner March 28th at the Johnson City Country Club. These awards are given to companies and individuals who have earned the respect of their peers for their skills, professionalism, and integrity.

J. A. Street & Associates was awarded the General Contractor Circle of Excellence Award, which was given to a firm that earned the respect of peers for skills, professionalism and integrity. Project Manager, Don Osborne, received the Project Manager of the Year Award. The firm was also awarded the Division I Project of the Year Award for the Grundy National Bank project based on a project’s design team, project management, scheduling performance, aesthetics, environmental sensitivity, innovation, safety record and overall quality of workmanship. The bank was designed by Appalachian Technical Services, Inc. (John Ponish, lead architect).

“I am honored to have the opportunity to be involved on quality projects like this one,” said Don Osborne, project manager for the Grundy National Bank project. “There were many challenges but our design and construction team worked together to bring



Before: The UVa-Wise library site excavation

the client a quality project.” This is Osborne’s second Project Manager of the Year award and second time to be the Project Manager on a job awarded Project of the Year.

Quesenberry’s Construction, a general contractor and construction manager in Big Stone Gap, Va., received the 2016 Division II Project of the Year Award. The company received the award for the new library at The University of Virginia’s College at Wise, located in Wise, Va. Cannon Design, the lead architect on the project, received the 2016 Architect of the Project of the Year award. Quesenberry’s Construction also won the AGC branch’s project of the year award in 2015.

“Quesenberry’s Construction is honored to receive the AGC Tri-Cities Branch 2016 Project of the Year award,” said President Abran Quesenberry, PE. “It was our privilege to serve as construction manager for the UVa-Wise Library. The design and construction team, our skilled employees, and the subcontractors and suppliers worked collaboratively to build the best product possible for the university. This prestigious award is a testament to everyone’s hard work and we thank the AGC for the recognition of our team’s efforts.”

The new six-story, 66,000 square foot UVa-Wise Library is poised on a steep embankment at the intersection of the academic and residential precincts. Besides abundant shelving for 300,000 volumes, the building includes group learning areas, multi-media space, lounge seating, a café and a tiered outdoor seating area. The library also provides critical 24-hour ADA compliant access between the upper and lower portions of campus.

Key challenges included the verticality of the site and the need for a delegated design earth retention system. Vice President and Project Manager Spencer Quesenberry, PE, noted “The retention system allowed for the excavation and installation of the foundations 73 feet below adjacent grade, while being located was less than 25 feet from a neighboring building on the busy campus.”



After: The UVA-Wise Library

As construction manager, Quesenberry's Construction's contract for the library was \$27.5 million.

The complete list of honorees is as follows:  
**2016 Supplier Of The Year Winner:** Gerdau Johnson City, Tn  
**2016 Subcontractor Of The Year Winner:** Chris Mullins Company, Inc Kingsport, TN  
**2016 Project Manager Of The Year Winner:** Don Osborne J. A. Street & Associates  
**2016 Superintendent Of The Year Winner:** Terry Webb Goinsrashcain Inc.

**2016 General Contractor Circle Of Excellence Award**  
 Separated Into Two Categories Based On Volume:  
**Category A Winner:** J. A. Street & Associates Blountville, Tn  
**Category B Winner:** Burleson Construction Company, Inc. Johnson City, Tn

**2016 Project Of The Year**  
 Separated Into Two Divisions Based On The Project's Contract Amount:  
**1st Place Division I \$5 Million & Under:** Project Name: Grundy National Bank Grundy, VA General Contractor: J. A. Street & Associates  
**1st Place Division II \$5 Million & Over:** Project Name: UVA-Wise New Library Wise, Va General Contractor: Quesenberry's, Inc.

**2016 Architect Of The Project Of The Year**  
 Separated into two divisions based on the project's contract amount:  
**1st Place Division I \$5 Million & Under:** Architect: John Ponish, Appalachian Technical Services, Inc. Project Name: Grundy National Bank Grundy, Va

**1st Place Division II \$5 Million & Over:** Architect: Cannon Design Project Name: UVA-Wise New Library Wise, VA.

The Associated General Contractors of America, established in 1918, is a full-service construction association with 100 Chapters and 33,000 firms including 8,000 General Contractors plus 25,000 industry associates, including subcontractors, specialty contractors, suppliers, equipment manufacturers and professional firms. Branches of the Nashville State Chapter are located in Tri-Cities, Knoxville, Middle Tennessee and West Tennessee. Tri-Cities AGC delivers a full range of quality services to its 200 members. Those services include Plan Room services, safety training, workforce development, Internet Plan Room Services, and government relations.

### ACFCU awarded \$2.1 million grant to help families achieve homeownership

Two hundred low and moderate-income families each will receive a \$10,500 down-payment assistance loan to help them with home purchases through a \$2.1 million grant awarded to Appalachian Community Federal Credit Union (ACFCU).

ACFCU will partner with multiple housing-related organizations across 30 counties in Tennessee, Virginia and Kentucky, and will complete the program within two years. The effort also is expected to have a positive effect on the area's housing sector.

"Homeownership is one of the most effective paths to building wealth and financial security, and for many low and moderate-income families it is the only path," ACFCU CEO Ron Scott said. "ACFCU provides members with tools to manage their finances and improve their credit scores. We provide a variety of fair lending options. But many deserving families still cannot muster the initial resources required for homeownership, so we're grateful for this opportunity to help radically change peoples' lives for the better."

ACFCU was one of fewer than 20 recipients in a highly competitive national grant process for the "Project Reinvest" program. The credit union is a federally certified Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), a status reserved for financial institutions dedicated to responsible, affordable lending to help low-income, low-wealth and other disadvantaged people and communities join the economic mainstream.

Adam Dickson, ACFCU's CDFI resource coordinator, said the grant allows ACFCU to enter a new chapter in its work as a CDFI, and to strengthen regional partnerships.

"We greatly respect the region's community develop-



Ron Scott



Adam Dickson



Retha Patton

**DEPARTMENTS, CONTINUED**

ment sector and their focus on affordable housing,” Dickson said. “Using this funding together with partners to change families’ lives for the better is one way we see ourselves as good stewards and effective collaborators.”

Families with incomes at or below the area annual median (around \$50,000 for a family of four) may qualify for the program. Many families in these income ranges still struggle to become homeowners, according to Retha Patton, Executive Director of Eastern Eight Community Development Corp., which is one of ACFCU’s primary partners in the effort.

“It’s going to be a huge game-changer for the people we work with,” Patton said. Eastern Eight helps low and moderate-income families achieve homeownership across eight Northeast Tennessee counties. Patton said many clients lack the upfront funds to close on a home.

“Many of those families are in what we call the zone,” Patton said. “It’s not about not being able to make the mortgage payment for 30 years. They can do that. It’s about upfront money.”

All families who receive the loans – which are payable only if the owner sells or refinances the home – will have completed eight hours of homeownership training.

ACFCU is working with a variety of realtors, lenders, non-profits and others to find potentially eligible families and help them achieve the American Dream. That dream continues to elude the grasp of many families with adequate income who lack the upfront resources to buy, Patton said.

“This really could be the difference between turning families away or saying, ‘wow, with this extra resource we can get you into a home finally,’” Patton said.

**Four innovators, leaders named to ETSU Business and Technology Hall of Fame**

Four individuals were recently inducted into the East Tennessee State University College of Business and Technology Hall of Fame.

Harvey L. Mitchell and Marshall L. Wilkins received the Lifetime Achievement Award, which is presented for significant achievements in business, technology or public service; exemplary service to the community; and a commitment to the College of Business and Technology and ETSU.

Mitchell retired in June 2016 as market president of the Tri-Cities Region for HomeTrust Bank after a 45-year career in the financial industry. He spent 40 of those years primarily in the Tri-Cities, working with both small independent and large regional banks, as well as assisting in the opening of a local start-up bank, for which he served as senior vice president of retail banking.

The Johnson City native graduated from Happy Valley High School and was honorably discharged from the U.S. Naval Reserve. He received his bachelor’s degree from ETSU and graduated from The Graduate School of Banking of the South at Louisiana State University.

In the community, Mitchell has served on many boards, including the United Way of Washington County and the American Red Cross of Northeast Tennessee, and is a member

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of the Kiwanis and Lions clubs. He currently serves on HomeTrust Bank's Tri-Cities Community Board and the board of directors of Areawide Development Corp. in Alcoa.

Mitchell resides in Jonesborough with his wife, Barbara, and they have two children and two grandchildren. He is a member of Heritage Baptist Church and has served with the Emmaus Community.

Wilkins, a native of Paducah, Kentucky, joined the Chick-fil-A fast food restaurant family in 1981 and today is the owner and operator of the Chick-fil-A franchise at Turkey Creek in Knoxville.

Wilkins attended ETSU and graduated with a degree in accounting in 1977. As a student, he was a senator in the Student Government Association and a member and officer of Sigma Chi Fraternity, in which he remains active as an alumnus. While earning his degree, he worked as a construction subcontractor in Knoxville. He later spent three years in sales with Oscar Meyer before joining Chick-fil-A.

Wilkins serves the community in numerous capacities within such organizations as Knoxville Open, the Knoxville Fellows



Harvey L. Mitchell



Marshall L. Wilkins

mentor program, Yoke Youth Ministries, Nucleus Knoxville, the American Heart Association, the Boys and Girls Club and Zoo Knoxville. An avid golfer, he is a member of the Holston Hills Country Club, and also enjoys lake activities, travel and leadership development. He is a member of Middlebrook Pike United Methodist Church and Bible Study Fellowship.

Wilkins and his wife, Clare Collins Wilkins, are the parents of one child.

Chris Meyer received the Award of Excellence, which is presented to individuals whose work has brought distinction to the College of Business and Technology. Although they may not be ETSU graduates, recipients must have significant accomplishments in business or technology, exemplary service to the community, and a demonstrated commitment to the college and ETSU.

Meyer, originally from Arlington Heights, Illinois, was a member of ETSU's renowned rifle team and was named to the



Chris Meyer



Edward Ho

SEE **DEPARTMENTS, 36**



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**DEPARTMENTS, CONTINUED**

All-Southern Conference rifle team four years in a row. He was selected Outstanding Computer Science Student in 1983 and graduated with a B.S. in computer science. For over 30 years, he has worked in software development, testing, architecture and management for IBM, where he has been issued numerous patents and published many papers and articles. He has spoken on technical topics around the globe.

Meyer has remained engaged with the university and the College of Business and Technology. He has served as IBM's university ambassador to ETSU since 2005 and on the ETSU Computer Science Advisory Board since 2006. He has recruited other ETSU computer science graduates to IBM and provided financial support to the Girls in Science and Technology program, which is organized and run by Department of Computing faculty each summer.

Meyer has served as an adult leader in the Boy Scouts of America since 2003, and through the IBM-North Carolina State University Pathfinders program, he has spent the past four years mentoring NC State engineering students in preparation for technical careers.

Meyer and his wife, Kristin, are members of ETSU's Distinguished President's Trust. They and their two sons live in Raleigh, North Carolina.

The Horizon Award, which is presented to graduates of the College of Business and Technology who are establishing

noteworthy careers and display significant accomplishments in business as well as a commitment to the college and ETSU, was presented to Edward Ho.

Ho, who has been in the technology industry in Silicon Valley since graduating from ETSU in 1999, currently works for the social media giant Twitter Inc. As general manager of Twitter's Consumer Product and Engineering Group, he leads the team responsible for developing and operating the Twitter product.

Ho began his career as a software engineer at Sony's U.S. Research Labs, where he was part of a team developing a machine translation product. Over the years, he held engineering positions at IBM's Almaden Research Center, Yahoo and Google. At Yahoo, he co-invented the highly acclaimed Yahoo Pipes product. During his five years as a staff software engineer and director of product management at Google, he led the development of multiple social products, including Google+.

After leaving Google in 2012, Ho co-founded and was chief technology officer of Cover, which was designed to personalize Android phones by learning the most frequently used apps. The company was acquired by Twitter in 2014. Over the course of his career, Ho has co-invented 17 issued patents.

Ho and his wife, Felicia, reside in Hillsborough, California, and are the parents of two children. 

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# Key to better employment? Finish what you start.

By McKenzie Todd



**W**e are rapidly approaching the time when it will not be enough to have “some college, but no degree or certificate.” By the year 2025, an estimated 55 percent of jobs in Tennessee will require a postsecondary degree or credential. Right now in

Tennessee, according to Census data, 39.3 percent of adults hold that postsecondary degree or credential. In order to meet rapidly approaching workforce and economic demands, Governor Bill Haslam launched the Drive to 55 to reach the goal of 55 percent of adults holding a degree or credential by the year 2025. The tagline of the Drive to 55 is “Mission: Workforce Ready” because that’s what the Drive to 55 ultimately is: a workforce and economic development initiative.

In Northeast Tennessee, nearly 50,000 adults have some college credits, but no degree or credential. For Tennessee to reach the Drive to 55, our communities have to reach these adults. According to data from the State of Tennessee, even if every student that graduates from high school over the next nine years goes directly to college and gets a degree, Tennessee still won’t meet the Drive to 55. Adult learners are vital to this statewide education goal and, more importantly, are critical to our state’s economic future.

Northeast Tennessee has begun to demonstrate the importance of investing in adult learners. Last year, we launched the Northeast Tennessee Reconnect Community, an initiative focused on reaching these 50,000 adults to “reconnect” them with higher education and gain the credentials they need to be competitive in the workforce and meet the needs of current and future employers in the area. This is

one of many ways that our community is working to support the growth of economic opportunity in this part of the state.

As community members, local leaders, employers, and educators, we are all in a position to emphasize the importance of postsecondary education to the overall health of our community. Making education a priority can be accomplished by changing the conversation about postsecondary education as a goal that is more achievable than ever for adults. Thanks to the Drive to 55 and initiatives like Northeast Tennessee Reconnect Community, Tennessee colleges and universities are working to make going back to college flexible for adult learners. Certainly, the importance of adult learners has gained new visibility with the leadership of the Governor and the General Assembly. These changes make college more accessible and open up doors once perceived as closed. We are poised to make a positive generational impact through education, career readiness, workforce development and economic growth.

You can promote education for adults in your local community. Talk to your employees, coworkers, customers, community members, family and friends about why supporting the Drive to 55 and prioritizing postsecondary education are imperative to the long-term success of our families, our community, and our entire state. Through this work we can help a parent set a standard for education for his or her family, move a family from welfare to work, and empower adults to move forward on personal and professional goals they only imagined.

For more information on the benefits of going back to college and free resources available for adults looking to complete a degree or credential, visit Northeast Tennessee Reconnect Community at [www.netreconnect.org](http://www.netreconnect.org).

*McKenzie Todd is program coordinator for Northeast TN Reconnect Community.*



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