Business Journal.com

Entrepreneurs

Big ideas, willingness to take risk and can-do attitudes drive region's next generation of job creators

Edwin Williams of Perserbid and Charles Kunene of Obaa. Photo by Sweet Snaps Photography.

Plus:

Clock ticking again on Ballad COPA and Virginia's new point

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man for economic development



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cover story

The Entrepreneurs

The Pitches and Pints competition showcased several of the region's young risk-takers. We'll meet some of them, along with a few of their contemporaries who didn't take part in the competition.

Photo by Sweet Snaps Photography

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KINGSPORT 100 Celebrating the Kingsport Spirit > 2017

Kingsport would not exist today were it nor for a chemist. That's hardly surprising for a city whose leading employer is a chemical company, but the chemist in question had nothing to do with the founding of the company that plays such a role in the city's business community today.

Before the city of Kinsport existed, the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railway planned to run a railroad through the area, but its top executives, particularly president George L. Carter, wanted to boom a town somewhere along the line. The CC&O hired chemist and geologist Charles Catlett to investigate the potential output of raw materials in the area that would become Kingsport. Catlett filed positive reports on the possibilities for cement, brick, tannic acid and wood pulp.

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

C.K. Morgan, a construction engineer for CC&O recalled the meticulous research and reporting methodology employed by the railway's agents and the recruiting effort their discoveries drove. "The resources of the Clinchfield were virtually card indexed by engineers, geologists, chemists and experts of all lines, working at the behest and under the direction of the industrial department of the

A CITY BORN OF CHEMISTRY

railroad. With data in hand, then began the dissemination of this information and quest for prospects that might be interested and available. Some were interested in mining coal, ores, kaolin, and feldspar; others in the manufacture of timber, brick, cement, tile, etc."

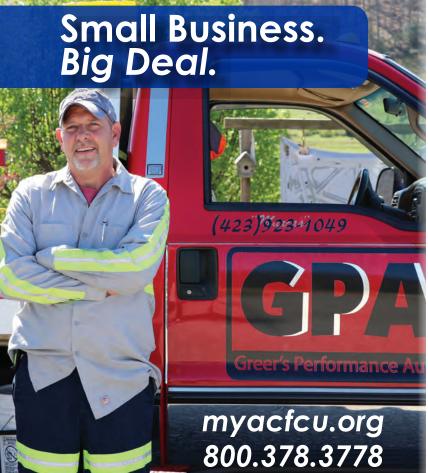
Of all Catlett's reports, the cement and brick report of August 1909 showed the most immediate promise, and samples were sent from the area around the Long Island on the Holston River to laboratories in Pittsburgh. The



George L. Carter

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

The effort to bring a cement company to Kingsport met with success despite the fact that there was no actual city yet. The quality of the raw materials convinced John Miller of the Dexter Portland Cement Co., of Nazareth, Pa., to build a plant there in 1910, with the railroad providing shipments of coal to power the plant at 50 cents per ton. By 1915 the Penn-Dixie plant was producing 5,000 barrels a day and Kingsport was well on its journey to becoming a city in 1917.



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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*

Writer's legacy isn't what it should be, and it's our fault



Inoticed something Unuusual during Memorial Day lunch. On the TV in the corner of the restaurant, ESPN was running a "breaking news" crawl in the holiday baseball game, and giving credit to another media outlet for the story. There were a couple of things unusual about that. First, ESPN is infamous in media circles for stealing other people's stories and attributing the news to

"sources." That's considered dirty pool in our business, taking the fruits of someone else's labor and pretending they're your own. The second unusual thing about it was that the outlet being credited was CNN.

CNN never breaks sports stories, and ESPN only runs news on their crawl when we go to war or elect a president. Almost never the twain shall meet.

What CNN and ESPN were reporting was that professional golfer Tiger Woods had been arrested around 3 a.m. for suspicion of DUI. I must admit that as I turned my attention back to the grilled chicken, I didn't have much of a reaction to that story aside from, "Well, at least nobody got hurt."

The story I did react to broke moments later.

As I walked to the car, my phone buzzed to give me the news alert that sportswriter Frank DeFord was dead. At that moment, I felt small and petty, though not because I jealously envied DeFord's long, successful career (though I, and everyone else who has made a serious effort to really write about people does, or should). I felt petty because I was angry that DeFord's passing happened on a holiday when nobody would hear about it, and that it happened on a day when Tiger Woods was gobbling up all the space in the media consciousness.

DeFord, you see, was one of the few grown-ups in the press box when sportswriters gathered. Heck, he was one of the few real writers. Many are glorified transcriptionists for coaches, players and agents (you'd be amazed at how many stories about potential movement of players from one team to another are planted by agents).

Most bio articles and columns you read - whether in sports, politics or business - are either hero pieces or hatchet jobs,

DeFord wrote honest profiles of people who were just as complicated as the rest of us, but happened to be professional competitors. In reading one of his profiles, one would notice that DeFord neither smoothed the rough edges of an athlete's personality, nor invented positive character traits where none existed. In DeFord's articles, we saw the subjects' good and bad traits, and how they showed those traits with sometimes-heartbreaking inconsistency. In short, DeFord was thoughtful, nuanced and honest.

In that spirit, I should mention that DeFord was not universally loved. He was widely seen as a fop, and was viewed by some as an Ivy Leaguer who lazily wasted his talent on sports when he should have been tackling sterner stuff. But even those criticisms are disguised praise.

DeFord was a wordsmith. He wrote strategically. By that, I do not mean that he wrote to make the reader feel the subject of the profile was a good or bad person, but rather that DeFord used the language well to serve the narrative. If you go back and read his work (si.com has been running a career retrospective with 10 pieces just a click away) you can see that he organized the words in his sentences for maximum impact, and that he was precise in the choosing of those words.

He even understood the word that was the title he bore: sportswriter. Sports was just a modifier. Writer was the part of the word that mattered.

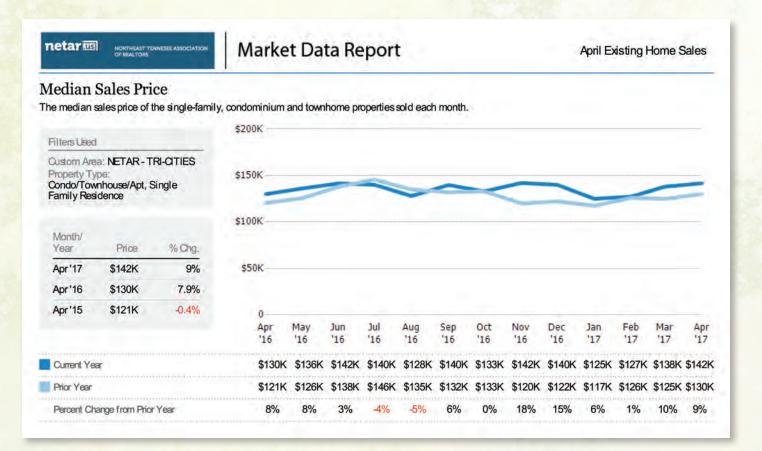
Sharing quotes from his work with you in this space would not do him justice. DeFord was not a writer who would write 1,590 words just to set up a ten-word quotable line. He wrote the 1,600 words that best told the story. He did not mistake being glib for being insightful.

DeFord's style doesn't sell these days though. That's on us as journalism consumers, and on those of us in the journalism industry who view ourselves now as (shudder) "content providers." Today we prefer short stories that treat even the most complex and important issues and individuals of our time with the "hero piece or hatchet job" mentality.

Frank DeFord's legacy isn't what it should be, and that's our fault.

We now return you to continuing coverage of the Tiger Woods' saga.

Sout I the



Pending home sales up 18 percent, inventory tightening

New pending home sales made their smallest year-over-year gain in nine months in April pushing the total number of accepted deals 18% higher than last year.

There were 748 new accepted offers on singlefamily, condominium and townhome properties in the 11-county region monitored by the Northeast Tennessee Association of Realtors'® (NETAR) Trends Report last month. That is a year-over-year increase of nine sales and ten more than March.

NETAR President Eric Kistner said April was the second straight month the new pending sales count has been in single digits. April's new deals combined with those that are still in the pipeline brought the month's total to 1,140, up 18% from April last year. "That's a 13-month high," he added. Pending sales typically take about six weeks to move from acceptance to closing, and it is not uncommon for about 4% of them to fall through.

At the same time pending sales have been increasing, new listings are again slowing. Kistner said new listings were ahead of the same month of the previous year from November through February but dropped into negative territory in March and April.

April's active listings were 21% below April last year. That gave us 5.39 months of inventory, Kistner said. April, last year we had 8.12 months of inventory, he added.

"Increasing sales and a tight inventory are pushing listing and sales prices," Kistner said. The average increase is not as much as those reported in some metro areas, but it's better than what we've seen in the past couple years, he added.

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

GigKingsport – While the Tennessee state government is enacting legislation to ensure rural areas can begin the climb to digital competitiveness in the coming year, Kingsport is already a Gig City. Through a partnership with Spectrum Enterprise, the city announced last month it has multi-gig capacity for users. In making the announcement, Mayor John Clark guoted the figure as, "up to 10 gigabytes and beyond."

KPS Global - The company announced it has recently completed a renovation and expansion of its Piney Flats facility, in which it has invested more than \$1 million. The expansion increased the facility in size by more than 70,000 square feet and increased press capacity half again. The Industrial Park Road location has several manufacturing lines that create custom insulated panel systems for use in various applications from retail food displays to climate controlled scientific chambers.

Not that kind of film – Eastman, the company born 97 years ago to serve the film company Eastman Kodak, has announced plans to expand its Performance Films manufacturing facility up the road in Martinsville, Va. The move is indicative of the company's commitment to the paint-protection film market. It's also a move that continues Eastman's dedication to innovation.

The future of old coal mines – Well, if the federal government is going to be handing out money for redevelopment of former coal mines, Virginia would be fools not to take it. So the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) has created an advisory group to determine how the \$10 million should be utilized. Among those named to the group are executives from LENOWIS-CO, VCEDA, Congressman Morgan Griffith's office and the DMME itself. Several ideas for former mine sites are already being kicked around, from solar farms to underground lakes for pumped hydro-electric power.

The war on coal's future – Why on earth would anyone who supports the coal industry in America want to severely hamper research into clean coal technologies? That's exactly what the Budget document the Trump administration sent to Congress does. That document drops funding by 84.1% for Carbon Capture and 85.8% for Carbon Storage. These are the technologies that energy companies say might allow coal to stand a chance of maintaining relevance in the next decade. So again, why cut them?



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24th Annual Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame Inductions



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Business leaders from throughout the region gathered May 31 at MeadowView Conference Resort and Convention Center to honor Eastman and its Chairman and CEO, Mark Costa. Full coverage of the event will be available in a special section of the July 2017 issue of The Business Journal.



Mark Costa accepts his honor. Photos courtesy Junior Achievement, Eastman



Eastman Senior Vice President David Golden accepts Eastman's honor.



public affairs, with husband John, mayor



Etta Clark, Eastman vice president, global United States Senator Bob Corker congratulates Costa and Eastman.

SWVA Ecomonic Forum 2017

The 2017 Southwest Virginia Economic Forum was held on the campus of the University of Virginia - Wise, May 10. Among the speakers were Elliot Eisenberg, the bowtie economist; Steve Smith of K-VA-T Food Stores, who represented GO Va; and Steven Moret, CEO of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership; Marjette Upshur, director of Economic Development for Lynchburg, Va.; and Erik Pages of Entreworks. For more coverage of Moret's remarks, see page 22. Videos of other presentations from the event are available at *uvawise.edu*.



Elliot Eisenberg gestures while talking about declining coal industry employment.



Stephen Moret explains his vision for bringing new jobs to the region. Photos by Tim Cox Photo/Graphics.



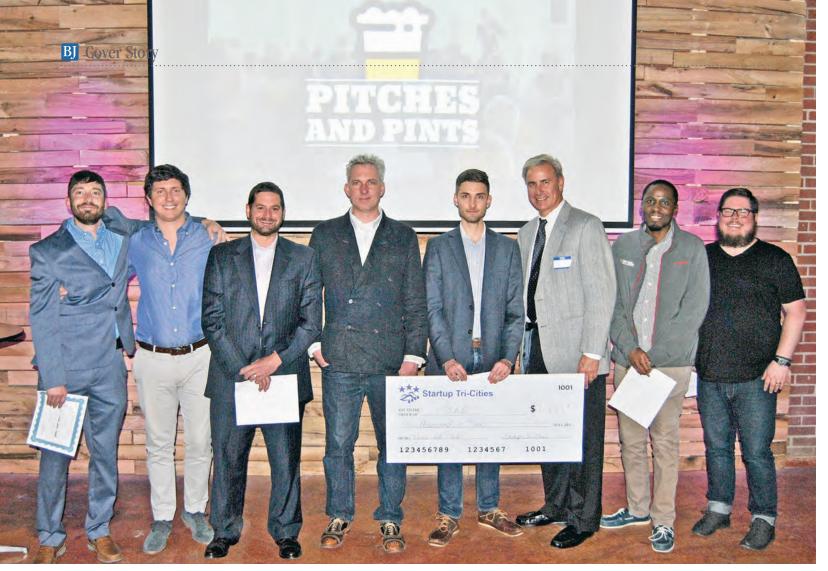
Shannon Blevins, UVa-Wise associate vice chancellor for economic development and engagement.



Dr. Donna Price Henry, chancellor of UVa-Wise, spoke of a sense of urgency and a strong desire to reimagine the future of the region.



Steve Smith discusses the goals of GO Va.



The participants in the Pitches and Pints event hosted by Start-Up Tri-Cities May 4: Luke Champouillon, Paul Champion, Michael Rice, Ben Collins, grand prize winner John Cowan, Kingsport Mayor John Clark, who presented the check to Cowan, Charles Kunene and James Eaton. Photo by Scott Robertson

Tri-Cities Entrepreneurs

Big ideas, willingness to take risks and can-do attitudes drive the next generation of job creators

by Scott Robertson

A spiring entrepreneurs presented ideas, gathered feedback, and in some cases, took home some muchappreciated assistance in the form of prizes from the Pitches and Pints pitch competition May 4 at the Model City Events Center in Kingsport. The competition, akin to TV's Shark Tank or the erstwhile Will This Float? competitions, drew seven entrepreneurs in addition to their hosts from Startup Tri-Cities, all entrepreneurs themselves.

Startup Tri-Cities is a network of entrepreneurs and organizations dedicated to supporting new startups in the Tri-Cities, TN/Va region. It was founded by Edwin Williams of Perserbid, Arnab Chakraborty of Flow Med-Tech, and David Nelson of and Travis Rother of Brewfund, Inc.

Pano, a basement start-up presented by John Cowan took

home the first-place prize of \$1,000 in cash and \$1,500 of consulting. Incredimed's HealthBase program, presented by Michael Rice, took second place, earning \$500 in business attorney services. Luke Champouillon's Action Sports Complex pitch earned a Co.starters entry and Charles Kunene's Obaa won a free pass from Spark Plaza for taking fourth place.

The event, attended by around 100 people, served as a reminder of the characteristics necessary for entrepreneurial success. Afterward the judges commented on the drive, creativity, resilience and courage shown by the entrants. This month *The Business Journal* will introduce you to some of those entrepreneurs, as well as others who did not compete in Pitches and Pints.

Perserbid links homeowners, contractors

dwin Williams' idea for his Estartup company, Perserbid, grew out of a tool he had created for another venture. "I caught the entrepreneur bug at the University of Missouri-St. Louis," Williams says. "Getfit Gadgets was the company I started in St. Louis. It was like a custom fitness equipment company. In St. Louis, we had our first prototype we were trying to get built. We were looking for a shop to take it to the next step. I came up with the idea of being able to post the prototype online and having manufacturing shops who do prototyping bid on the job. I could send them my prototype (specs), they could build it, I'd pay for it and they'd send it to me."

One Christmas when Williams was back in Johnson City visiting family, an alternate use for his bid system appeared. "My mom was complaining about a contractor who had messed up her bathroom and I was like, 'Oh, well, I've been working on this idea for manufacturing; I wonder if it would work for residential contracting." Williams went back to St. Louis, rewrote his entire business plan as Getfit Gadgets was ending its run, and moved back to the Tri-Cities.

In Perserbid's business model, the company acts as a go-between for homeowners and contractors, taking a 6 percent cut from every job on the homeowner side and 3 percent on the contractor side. "Let's say you want your kitchen remodeled," Williams explains. "You create a job ticket with the description of what you want. Then contractors will see it and will contact you. You can talk with them through our chat system before you pick which ones you want to come



Perserbid founder Edwin Williams in Kingsport. Photo by Sweet Snaps Photography

out to give quotes. Then they do the quotes on the site so you can compare them. When you pick a contractor, that contractor then sets up an escrow schedule so they can break down the payments as draws. You'll get a notification when the contractor needs you to release the funds. That process continues until each milestone is hit." Once the job is complete, the homeowner signs off on it.

Williams' Perserbid journey has taken him from St. Louis, through ETSU, the local home builders association, and KOSBE. Now, however, Williams feels Perserbid is far enough along he can devote time to helping other entrepreneurs. "Time is precious," Williams says. "Entrepreneurs need to spend it growing their companies. We just want to make life easier for the next guy than it was for us."

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Obaa offering scientists secure, worldwide collaboration tool

When Arnab Chakraborty, one of the founders of Startup Tri-Cities began recruiting Charles Kunene to bring his business to Kingsport, Kunene's first response was, "there's nothing there." Kunene had been working in a business accelerator at MIT. But Chakraborty proved Kunene wrong, introducing the Swaziland-born entrepreneur to mentors and medical researchers in the region who could help Kunene get his product, Obaa, off the ground by making it easier for him to prove his concept.

Put simply, Obaa is a software product that combines cloud-based messaging and file sharing to allow researchers to collaborate better in teams, even across national borders. "Researchers often cannot share and communicate with teammates on the same platform," Kunene says. "So we're combining their communications and their files into the same app so they won't need to log in to a different app to back up or store their files or to share them, and they don't need to use yet another app such as email or whatsapp to communicate with colleagues wherever they are. They can do all of that with obaa.

"One of the big issues researchers have now is that if they are working at a big institution, typically their files are stored in a local server. That means if you're working with another researcher in South America or China and you're sharing proprietary data, it's hard to share those files and keep an accurate audit of who in your lab has access to them. We're taking that into the cloud so it won't matter where they are or what device they're using."

One example Kunene sites is Southern Methodist University in Dallas, an institution with which he is currently in talks. "We talked to them initially for customer development and that's where we really came up with our principal use case with a researcher who had colleagues in China and colleagues in South America. At SMU they also make researchers buy a drive that is secure, but they don't subsidize the cost. So if you work at SMU, you have to pay for this encrypted drive to store your data, which you then can't share with someone somewhere else. It only allows researchers to take their work home. So that lab creates an (Obaa) account for the lab and has their researchers within that bucket. That allows them to share documents with each other, and they can invite people in onto the platform from other countries who can then view that data."

Of course the idea of sharing research data across national borders, or anywhere online, raises security concerns, which Kunene says Obaa addresses. "Our platform is hosted on Google Cloud which itself is certified with multiple PCI certifications. But we've also done some legwork on our platform to make sure data is secure at rest and in transit. So not only are we backed up by Google's platform, but we have security in our own product to make sure data is safe."

Other ventures including Slack, Accutest, Lablynx and



Obaa founder Charles Kunene in Kingsport. Photo by Sweet Snaps Photography



LabWare are ahead of Obaa in entering the market, but none have the same model, Kunene says.

"Going forward one of the big issues is what kind of feature set we want. Every file sharing platform has the same basic package - send messages and so forth. You have the basic text messaging and audio and video calling, and that's on our timeline right now. But I really think the opportunities in artificial intelligence to enable people to work faster on the same platform instead of having to do everything manually will be the big differentiator for us. We see some opportunities as well for augmented reality, especially in the healthcare space."

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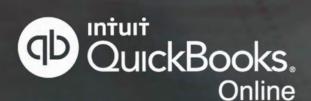
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Madison Hilliard and John Cowan in Pano's basement office in Bristol. Photo by Scott Robertson

Pano takes a panoramic view

John Cowan had had enough. Working 19 hour days for a large corporation in Rockville, Md., left him little free time, and what free time he had was largely wasted because he'd had no time to build up a network of friends. He didn't know what to do or where to go. "I felt a real strong disconnection from the community, and I knew I wanted to develop something to expedite that (community inclusion) process," Cowan says from the Bristol basement from which he and a few colleagues are developing that something.

"I left the company, saved up some money and started Pano in an effort to connect young professionals in the area," Cowan says. "The idea at the time was to get access to a user base through gyms. In fact, I'm embarrassed to say the original name for the product was gymlink. That didn't work at all. There just weren't enough people at gyms. Our customer acquisition cost was just way too high. The demographics were splintered."

But when you look at college, the numbers are there, as is a similar sense of disassociation - at least among freshmen, and the demographics are consistent.

"So I had another aha moment that we could hit the colleges first, then expand into the young professionals niche," Cowan says.

"The idea instantly resonated with universities, who became

our partners instead of our customers because they're facing issues of attrition," Cowan says. "Even students who are succeeding academically, if they feel socially isolated, it just kills their spirit and they are more likely to drop out."

So with a base of colleges and universities eager to engage students as part of a greater community providing a population of eyeballs for advertisers, the question became, 'how do we create the value for businesses that will generate revenue for our business?'

Madison Hilliard handles marketing, strategic branding and design for Pano. She had been working with yik yak, another social media app when Cowan approached her. "It was something I wanted to get on board with because it was something I believed in," she said.

The business model Hilliard and Cowan have settled on crowd-sources the process. Students post "memories" from their experiences at businesses. Those businesses are then charged for the mentions in the community, though at much lower rates than on sites like facebook. The businesses' subscriptions to Pano are the chief revenue driver for the company.

Cowan and Hilliard credit another colleague, Daniel Baker, for handling the tech side. Says Hilliard, "The three of us have formed this dream team of collaboration."

Walls pictures a thriving travel business

Photographer Benjamin Walls, who owns his own gallery on State Street in Bristol, has spent the last decade travelling the world to capture breathtaking images of landscapes and wildlife most of us will only see remotely. In the last year, however, he has taken to the notion of helping more people see those sights firsthand.

Walls, who says he has traveled more than a million miles in the last decade, including stops on every continent save Antartica, recently founded Wallsabout, an agency offering high-end tours of areas Walls has visited in his travels.

Walls first considered the enterprise when it was suggested by a client who, upon seeing photographs Walls had taken in Africa gushed, "I wish you could take us!"

What those clients didn't know was that before he became a professional photographer, Walls studied business and tourism at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C. "In fact, my senior project in tourism was, in shorthand, what we're doing with Wallsabout today. So had I tried my hand at being a photographer and failed, I probably would have gone straight into something like Wallsabout."

The fact that he has had enough success to finance a decade of excursions, however, has put Walls in the position to offer tours from a perspective of experience. Not many tourism agents have spent the amount of time out of country Walls has, nor the contacts. "I can't say enough about how important it is to have a really good asset in country," he says, "a guide, somebody who knows the lay of the land and can take care of details.

Walls began researching whether it would make business sense to begin the new venture a couple of years ago. "I'm an artist, but I'm also a businessperson. I study the numbers and pay attention to the details every other businessperson does - feasibility, human resources – this is business.

"We have four trips planned right now, but we didn't start out that way. We did a lot of research. We needed to know what our clients' expectations would be and whether we would be able to meet that. We did our first trip, a luxury safari to Africa ad it went really well, so that gave me the proof and the confidence to say, 'Okay, this is a feasible thing. Let's see if we can book another Africa trip. Then we looked at other places I'd been. That's what put Australia and New Zealand in play because I know those places so well. Then based on client feedback we found there was demand for Cuba."

That those clients have already seen beautiful images of these places doesn't hurt in selling the tours, of course.



Benjamin Walls in his Bristol gallery.



Members of Wallsabout's first tour group on safari.

"My clients have followed what I have done, whether it was going to Africa or India, these exotic places. They figure, 'Here's a guy that's managed that and has been there and back. He knows the lay of the land. He knows the guides'. So I think it was pretty natural for them to make that request of me."

Ballad is back on the clock, but what has changed?

By Jeff Keeling

Zero hour is back on the horizon for a state decision on Wellmont Health System and Mountain States Health Alliance's proposal to merge. More than four months after an unexpected delay in the process, the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) announced May 22 it had deemed the systems' application for a "Certificate of Public Advantage" (COPA) complete.

TDH announced on its initial deadline for a decision, Jan. 13, that it would "allow the applicants to make additional submissions to their application." Since then, the COPA application proper has not been altered, but accompanying the May 22 announcement were links on TDH's website to three studies solicited by the hospital systems. The additional submissions concluded that the merger would create significant benefits for area consumers, despite the market power the single system would wield.

That market power, essentially amounting to an inpatient hospital monopoly over a broad region, is the reason the systems must seek a COPA in Tennessee and cooperative agreement in Virginia. Such state-regulated agreements, of which there are few nationwide, are designed to create an enforceable regulatory structure that insures benefits created by an anticompetitive merger outweigh any harms the lessened competition might create for consumers. Those potential harms have been exhaustively delineated in lengthy opinions submitted by the Federal Trade Commission, buttressed by several outside opinions from economists and the insurance industry.

The new submissions are encapsulated most broadly in an April 11 assessment from Compass Lexecon, an economic consulting firm whose specialties include antitrust, competition and regulatory change. The primary author, Margaret Guerin-Calvert, is a former Department of Justice employee who served in the antitrust division there. She's served as an expert in hospital merger cases from the 1990s to the present, and has been called in on a Pennsylvania health system affiliation that has included, "review of an integrated delivery system and its benefits, as well as conduct and performance commitments, and evaluation of competition."

Guerin-Calvert's report incorporates findings from the other two submissions, which delve into the systems' plans to establish their own integrated delivery system, to improve population health, and to move forward into more "risk-based contracting" payment models. The heavily footnoted, 36-page report reviews the region's healthcare and economic challenges. It touts the systems' readiness to tackle those challenges, which include poor population health factors and outcomes. And it spends several pages building cases that "adverse impacts" on payors, on physicians/competitors/suppliers/employees and on patients are "not likely" – a bar that's required to be cleared for approval of the COPA.

With respect to payors, the study claims the merged system, "would face substantial constraints and ultimately be unsuccessful if the organization tried to exercise market power when negotiating rates or service arrangements..." In another section the report takes on the FTC's contention that the merger would be difficult to enforce, pricing-wise, because of health care's changing payment models. The Compass report claims that the systems are well-placed for the market's move from fee-forservice to risk-based contracting, and in such a way that payors will be protected. "Under the COPA, with the commitments regarding population health and efficiencies, Ballad Health will have significant incentives to negotiate mutually beneficial risk contracts with payors to gain the potential cost savings and benefits from their investments in new care models."

Likewise, the report is sanguine about the concerns of independent practitioners. It says the systems' plans for IT and other data systems will "provide more data and information and connectivity for all physicians, rather than (limit) those resources." Additionally, it notes, plans for expanded population health initiatives, and new forms of coordinated and value-based care, will rely on alignment with independent doctors and should, "provide incentives that benefit, rather than reduce, physician competition."

The new material isn't all TDH commissioner Dr. John Dreyzehner and Tennessee Attorney General Herb Slatery are weighing, TDH spokesman Bill Christian said. "As part of our ongoing process, the department has been consulting with the Attorney General's office as well as with outside experts," he said.

Additionally, the systems have submitted to Slatery additional documents not made public "that contain competitively sensitive information." Christian also said TDH officials plan to engage additional outside experts and potentially to solicit outside reviews of the application and additional materials before the new deadline for an up or down decision Sept. 19.

Finally, Christian said, TDH officials have been and will continue meeting with the applicants. Those ongoing conversations have included phone calls and in-person meetings.

"Generally, these conversations have been to outline what operations would look like beyond legal requirements and beginning discussions about what a potential regulatory structure would look like," Christian said.

Individuals can submit comments regarding the proposed merger and COPA by mail or on the TDH website until July 18, which is also the date of the last scheduled public hearing on the matter, at 5:30 p.m. at the Northeast State Community College Auditorium in Blountville. Virginia State Health Commissioner Dr. Marisa Levine plans to announce a decision on the cooperative agreement in mid-September as well.

Jeff Keeling is vice president of communications for Appalachian Community Federal Credit Union and the former associate editor of The Business Journal.

Northeast State/RCAM to launch registered apprenticeship program

Kingsport's Silgan Closures has partnered with Northeast State to launch a registered apprenticeship program that provides a paycheck and job training at the same time. Four Silgan employees will participate in the four-year program, receiving classroom instruction from the College's Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) and on-the-job training from Silgan. At the end of the program, the workers receive a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) certificate of completion.

RCAM is a registered apprenticeship sponsor, meaning it can put together a training package – per DOL guidelines - for companies of any size. This training is especially valuable for small- and mid-size companies that might not otherwise be able to offer or sustain an apprenticeship program. "We're able to put DOL registered apprenticeship structure together for them and deliver it as a turn-key package," said Jeff Frazier, RCAM dean. "We can offer it to any size company whether it has one apprenticeship or 20. This allows them to take advantage of the same level of training available to Fortune 500 companies."

The Silgan employees will be enrolled in RCAM's mechatronics technician program. Mechatronics technicians perform critical maintenance and repairs on complex systems that use robotics, Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs), hydraulics/pneumatics, and electrical/electronic circuits. Each of the Silgan apprentices was nominated to apply by the company. They completed RCAM's application process, which requires a work history, the ACT WorkKeys exam, and an interview.

The agreement was formalized on May 11 during a ceremony attended by College, State of Tennessee, and Silgan executives at the RCAM facility in Kingsport.

Silgan Closures designs, manufactures and markets a wide range of closure products as well as equipment and engineering services for the dairy, juice, water, and other non-carbonated beverage markets. Headquartered in Downers Grove, Ill., the company's Kingsport facility is located at 408 Tilthammer Drive.

According to the DOL, the apprenticeship benefits are substantial - companies that use such programs can diversify their workforce, improve productivity and profitability, standardize training, reduce turnover, receive tax credits, and more. From careers in healthcare, energy and IT, to manufacturing, transportation and more, Registered Apprenticeship has dramatically impacted the lives, careers, and opportunities for millions of workers, and more than 150,000 businesses over the last 75 years. The DOL Office of Apprenticeship has more than 1,100 occupations approved for apprenticeships at this time.



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Ramsey Agriculture Center opens for business

new meeting facility available Ato businesses and organizations began operations last month, bearing a familiar name. Before a crowd of nearly 300 people, the Ron Ramsey Agriculture Center near the Tri-Cities airport officially opened its doors May 20.

"For many years, I served not only the people of Sullivan County, but also the citizens of Tennessee," said former Lt. Governor Ron Ramsev. "What motivated me as an elected official was bringing value to the people that elected me and by doing things that improved the quality of life for all Tennesseans. This center will bring great value to our region by providing a useful, multipurpose venue with modern amenities," Ramsey said.

The new center features a 300-seat conference area with a commercial kitchen. The conference room boasts

12-foot motorized projection screens, laser projectors, encrypted wireless microphones, touch screen audio controls, visual interface, podiums, and edge-to-edge sound coverage. The sound system, projectors and room can be split into two separate rooms when hosting various sized events that may require multiple rooms.

"The Ron Ramsev Agriculture Center will be an all-inclusive venue for agriculture education in our region." said County Director & Extension Agent Chris Ramsey. "The ag center will allow us to bring a greater awareness to agriculture in our region.

The center will also be a great economic multiplier through agricultural events. The ag center will attract regional, statewide, and multi-state events, benefitting a wide and diverse audience."



Ron Ramsey poses in front of the newly opened center, May 20.

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Moret pitches a new vision for Southwest Virginia

"We must succeed where other states have failed."

By Scott Robertson

Stephen Moret brought a simple message to the SWVA Economic Forum at UVa-Wise May 10: Southwest Virginia no longer ends at Roanoke in the minds of the Commonwealth's economic development partnership. Moret, who was named the VEDP's CEO last November, outlined a sixpoint plan for addressing Southwest Virginia's economic challenges as part of a broader set of goals for the state.

Moret laid part of the blame for the loss of jobs and population in Southwest Virginia at Richmond's feet. The state has been "quiet" in economic development competition for the last few years, he said, which has been just fine for areas like Newport News and Northern Virginia, but has ill-served rural communities.

"Rural Virginia is competing with

places like South Carolina, Georgia and Mississippi," Moret said, "places that have been much more aggressive in the last few years than we have. The most important thing I can do this year is to answer the question, 'What will it take to make ALL of Virginia grow? What will it take to make Southwest Virginia actually experience population growth?"

The region is expected to continue to lose population over the next 10 years. "The best data we have available shows that Southwest Virginia will lose close to 1,000 people a year," Moret said. "Obviously there are huge implications for that. How do we turn that around?

"If we were to add just 250 direct jobs per year, those would result in about 500 total jobs in support services, health care, retail and other areas. Virginia has about two people for every job we have. So in order to avoid losing 1,000 people per year, we need an additional 250 direct jobs per year over and above what the region is producing. Yes, it's a challenge. Yes, we are facing competition nationally. But this is something we can achieve. But we need the Commonwealth of Virginia to play its part and to play its part better than we have in the past."

Moret laid out a six-point plan to begin to accomplish that goal:

- 1. Create a world-class, turn-key, customized workforce development program for competitive economic development projects.
- 2. Dramatically expand computer science and related programs at



Stephen Moret outlines his economic agenda for Southwest Virginia at the SWVA Economic Forum, May 10. Photos by Tim Cox Photo/Graphics

UVa-Wise and other higher education institutions.

- 3. Adopt policy changes to address Virginia's uncompetitive state/local tax environment for new, capitalintensive manufacturing projects.
- 4. Develop a job-creation payroll credit with higher incentive values for projects developed in rural areas.
- 5. Brand rural Virginia as the most attractive location in the U.S. for manufacturing, lower-cost software development, business process outsourcing and data centers.
- 6. Catalyze one or more high-quality, mixed-use developments that would be attractive to young professionals.

"These are by no means the only things that will make a

difference," Moret said, reiterating the VEDC's commitment to improve its efficiency in bringing new opportunities to the region. "If you look at the rankings by site selection consultants nationally in statewide workforce development programs, Virginia is not in the top three, we're not in the top five, we're not even in the top 10 in this space. If we were to launch a program like this we could go to the top five in three years and even the top three in five years. It would make a profound difference in economic development in rural Virginia and Southwest Virginia in particular."

When asked about leveraging cross-border synergies, especially with businesses that operate in both Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, Moret was enthused. He pointed out the fact that state officials from the northern and eastern parts of Virginia have complained about difficulty of travelling to Southwest Virginia by air when the Tri-Cities Airport was readily available for commercial flights. "So one very simple thing we're going to do is start using Tri-Cities Airport when we have things in Southwest Virginia so we give a better feel for the real transportation opportunities throughout the region.

"We need to do a better job of being open to the reality that some of these economic development wins are going to be multistate wins and take advantage of the fact that all of that workforce is out there," Moret added. "In getting the general assembly to get past their sensitivity to that fact, we just need to focus on how much of the workforce is likely to come from Virginia and how much is likely to come from outside Virginia."

Emory & Henry launches unique PA program



Ryan Short receives his white coat at the Lincoln Theatre ceremony May 22. Photo courtesy Emory & Henry College

By Scott Robertson

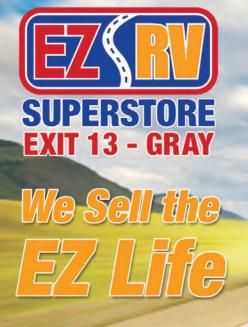
Thirty first-year students donned white coats for the first time to inaugurate a one-of-a-kind program at Emory & Henry May 22. The Department of Physician Assistant Studies' first class will center its studies at the Marion, Va., campus once owned by Mountain States Health Alliance. The students will receive training in a way unlike any other program, said Dr. Scott Richards, program director.

"We are one of the only PA programs to start clinical immersions on Day One. The students follow the faculty into the Mel Leaman Free Clinic throughout their first year before they go on their clinical rotations to make sure they're well-prepared. We are the only program in the United States to have a full two semesters of behavioral medicine and psychiatry in our curriculum. We are also the only program in the curriculum to have a mandatory hospice care training program and rotation, and we're one of the only programs to have a mandatory cardiology/pulmonology rotation."

Students will attend year-round for 27 months and earn a master's degree. Physician assistants are advanced practice health professionals who practice clinical medicine as members of a team.

"It's unique in so many ways," Dr. Lou Fincher, dean of the School of Health Sciences said. "All of our programs are designed to be very collaborative and interprofessional, so our PA students will be working very closely with PT and other students learning to be part of a multidisciplinary team which has been shown to improve outcomes."

The program focuses on rural health care, Fincher said. "Our connection with the community and support from the community is unique because we are revitalizing Marion. It's a partnership between us, the town and the county."



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Officials with Frontier Secure, the Wise County IDA and the Virginia Coalfields Economic Development Authority pose with a \$5.6 million check last June in Wise. Photo by Tim Cox Photo/Graphics

VCEDA: Sykes acquisition of Frontier Secure will not affect VCEDA loan payment

By Scott Robertson

Sykes Enterprises acquisition of Frontier Secure, formerly a division of Frontier Communications, will not affect the repayment of the \$5.6 million Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority loan that had paved the way for Frontier Secure to open its Wise, Va., call center last year, according to VCEDA's executive director.

"This doesn't change the conditions on the loan," Jonathan Belcher told *The Business Journal*. It's repaid in essence through the rent payments the company makes to the (Wise County) IDA. That part of it is still the same. It's just substituting Sykes for Frontier." The payments the company makes to the IDA will then be sent on to VCEDA.

While Sykes did not name Frontier Secure in its release June 1, it said, "it has completed the acquisition of the certain assets of the telecommunications services provider." Two sources with knowledge of the deal confirmed to *The Business Journal* in May that Frontier Secure was the target of an acquisition bid by Sykes.

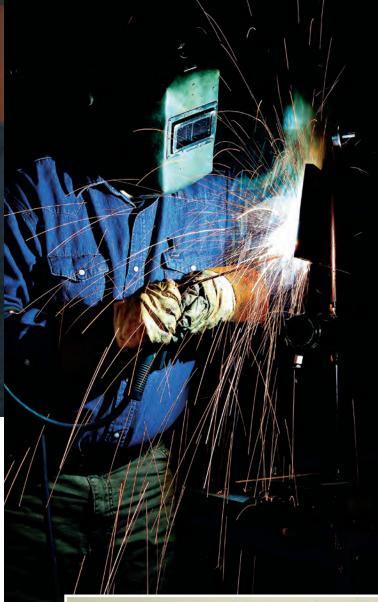
In addition, statements by SYKES CFO John Chapman pointed to Frontier Secure as the acquired party. "We get ready-made revenues and delivery infrastructure across four sites with both existing and new strategic clients, that span the financial services and technology verticals," Chapman says.

In May, help wanted ads for the Frontier Secure locations in Deland, Fla., Lindon and Provo, Utah and Wise all ended with the disclaimer, "This position will be transferring from Frontier to SYKES Enterprises, Inc. on June 1, 2017." On June 2, those ads were replaced with the statement," We apologize for the incon-

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Jpdate Job Agent	someone who has the following: Critical thinking: Your thoughts need to be 'on fleek'. (What is fleek? Apparently it's a thing thought. If you were stuck on a desense
Recruiting Agency Login	island, how would you get off? Don't worry, we won't stick you on an island, but we do want you to be creative with your approach with the customer. Ask questions, Lots of questions. Solve their problem.
Customer Care	Communication: You know that thend that never lets you linish your story? Don't be that person. We want you to listen to the outomer so you can respond accordingly to help lix their problem. You're like a counselor. But instead you're troubleshooting their banking issues.
Engineering/Technology	not their dating life. Positive Attitude: If vourie happy and you know it, clap your hands. And spoty for this job! People will call in that are happy. People will call
Corporate	In that are grumpy. You get to be the one to turn that frown upside down. Warm-fuzzies all around!
Sales	Bealilient: Receip egit grumpy. Really grumpy. Especially when it comes to their money. Let's be honest, you would bor if your payment or \$2000 didn't go through. (And if you bon't get worked up over loaing that much money at a time, then apparently you don't need a job!) You need to be able to duit yourself off and pick up the phone again!
Campus Recruiting	Superstar-ness: No, it's not a word. But, we still want you to be a superstar. Be enthusiastic. Don't sound like a robot on the phone. These are the words. We want you to actually have a personality. We want you to be easer to learn new things. This job can be challenging, Are
Military Careers	you up for it?
Frontier Secure	So what's in it for you? • We have full benefits after 30 days (medical, dental, vision, 401K) • 4 weets paid vacation (Laf's be neal, you need this in your life so you can binge-watch TV shows)
Dulture	S5500 Tuiton Reimbursement, School is expensive. The price of books are too dang high! A great environment. Everyone says it. We mean it. We have tub firms options. We even have bar firms. Ask us about it.
Employment FAQs	We want you. Really, we do. But here's the califon • At least a high worked diplome or GED • Must be all least 18 years or dolor
	You have to pass a drug and background test

venience, but this position's status has recently changed. Please select another position to apply to." At the same time, Sykes had added Deland, Linden, Provo and Wise to its online list of sites.

In a May 8 press release announcing Sykes' Q1 financial results, Sykes listed the purchase price of its April 24 acquisition at \$7.5 million, which is slightly less than 10 percent of the revenue generated by those assets last year.



NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership Congratulates RCAM

There are many reasons we are known as Where Tennessee Begins Its Business Day. Not only is Northeast Tennessee among the first in the state to see the sun come up each morning, Sullivan County also has a history of innovation and milestone firsts.

The Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) is the first comprehensive advanced manufacturing facility in the state of Tennessee that is structured as a public/private partnership. This allows companies of all sizes - whether it's a small company or a Fortune 300 - to take advantage of the same caliber of training. The RCAM is a truly differentiating advantage that NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership has utilized to secure recruitment wins and a valuable partner in helping our existing industries grow.

Congratulations to Northeast State Community College on the launch of RCAM's registered apprenticeship program. The RCAM has shown that it can put together a training package that meets Department of Labor guidelines and the demands of industry in a highly competitive marketplace. Thank you for being such a meaningful business asset to our citizens - both corporate and private. Keep up the outstanding work!



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The Micronic Technologies team

Micronic Technologies creating a ripple effect in Southwest Virginia's workforce

The second in a series of articles by the United Way of Southwest Virginia

Necessity is the mother of invention, and fewer needs are greater than the need for clean water. That need inspired Karen Sorber and her husband Kelly Rock to start Micronic Technologies in 2008.

Sorber said, "In 2007, a year prior to marrying my husband, I was in Peru on a humanitarian visit. I saw these young children that lived without water, and the impact of that on their lives and their health. I came away committed that one day I would be able to do something to help people in Peru and Africa get water. Then, Kelly and I reconnected through a mutual friend. I mentioned my idea about providing water to them, and he said he had an idea about how to clean water."

A year later, they were married and began a start-up company, Micronic Technologies, both determined to make a lasting impact on the world by creating a technology that could clean water from any source.

Though Micronic is a start-up, Sorber and Rock are all but inexperienced. Sorber, the CEO, has more than 35 years of experience in building and leading private and federal organizations. She has delivered studies and assessments in policy, management, and the technical aspects of federal acquisition.

Rock who serves as chief technology officer invented Micronic's innovative technology, MicroEVAP. Rock previously invented 21 patented automotive, medical, and water technologies, and now holds five patents, which he has assigned to Micronic.

Together, with their growing team, they've built a company. "Did I think it was going to take eight years and almost \$5 million to even get to where we are?" Sorber said. "No, I didn't." She also didn't think they'd end up in Southwest Virginia.

In the late 2000s, Sorber was in an entrepreneurial development program with the Northern Virginia Technology Council. Through multiple connections, she was introduced to the support available for innovative start-ups in Southwest Virginia. She met with county leaders and economic development officials and was introduced to UVa-Wise, a college willing to share its research and development resources. She applied for multiple grant opportunities, and in 2013 and 2014, because of new grant funding amounting to over \$3 million from UVa-Wise, the Virginia Tobacco Commission, the US Department of the Navy, and the US Department of Agriculture, Micronic Technologies relocated to Wise.

MicroEVAP, Rock explains, is basically a tornado that separates water from contaminants via evaporation, compression, and condensation – cleaning it from any source at less cost, more efficiently, and more effectively than any other technology on the market.

"It is really about trying to bring water to people, ultimately," said Sorber. What she could never have predicted was that Micronic's innovative technology would bring the people of Southwest Virginia more than clean water.

It would bring hope.

The coal industry's decline has displaced many workers. After moving to Southwest Virginia, Sorber realized her husband's invention could have even more impact. "We could put coal miners back to work," she said. "They're not just older guys, you know. Some are in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, and they have skills that would transfer to another industry. The miners are used to being outside, they're used to working with heavy equipment. They could cultivate the rare earth elements from the acid mine drainage brine using our technology. We can license our technology and they could make a living on it, and they could solve a problem – solve a lot of problems."

Since moving to Southwest Virginia, Micronic Technologies has hired almost a dozen people to help during the R&D process, creating jobs for employees who may have had to find employment outside of the region otherwise.

Now, Sorber is bringing hope to the region's future workforce. Micronic's partnership with UVa-Wise allows faculty and students to be involved in almost every step along the way, including conducting water quality testing, creating simulations, and collecting data – giving students hands-on experience. As of now, she has hired five employees who started as interns at Micronic, including Brianna Stallard, a graduate of UVa-Wise who Sorber says now plays a huge role in the company's day-to-day operations.

Stallard, now operations coordinator for Micronics, said, "I wanted to stay in Southwest Virginia after graduating college. I wasn't sure I was going to be able to find a job here in my field. Now, almost three years later, here I am dealing with just about every aspect of the company – I mean every little thing – and I love it."

It's not an easy task to develop technology that could put an entire industry back to work or give the entire world access to clean



Kelly Rock and Karen Sorber

water. It takes time to research and develop. It takes investments from companies who believe in their mission. It takes dedicated employees who are okay with not getting bonuses or raises until the product makes revenue. Micronic incentivizes and rewards the staff as a team with stock options based on company goals.

It takes innovation and strategy to bring the product to scale. And it takes the support of a community to allow the development of an innovative technology with the potential to change Southwest

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OPERATION TOMORROW, CONTINUED

Virginia and the world.

Sorber said, "I am starting to get stronger leads into some significant players in the water field, but it is hard. Once it's fully developed, we will either license the technology to a number of companies, or we ultimately plan to exit with an acquisition of the company. When that happens, we will likely continue to manufacture here. We just won a new tobacco commission grant that would ready us for manufacturing and sales next year, but we are looking for investors to match that, which is really important.

"That's my next big goal, because once we have investors to match that grant, we will make it into the marketplace to sell, and will become much more financially stable, shifting out of the R&D environment. Once you get to market, and you are post revenue, and you are making sales, then it is not hard to get investment to grow. It is very hard to secure money right now – very, very hard - blood, sweat, and tears. We want to get to production with this new grant and investor match in the next year or two, and then we want to scale it to a larger level, because bigger is better in water purification, and we have people wanting to buy it now."

Micronic is planning several pilot projects this year: one in Lee County and one in Wise County to address mine drainage, and two more pilots in Wise County and at the Virginia Tech agricultural dairy farm to address agricultural runoff.



Sorber at Micronic headquarters

Next steps for Micronic Technologies include securing match money from investors; developing licensing agreements with large strategic partners to commercialize MicroEVAP; and establishing relationships with non-governmental organizations to deploy the technology in developing countries.

The company's future for preserving water resources is very promising, and so is the company's future for preserving another valuable resource – Southwest Virginia's people.





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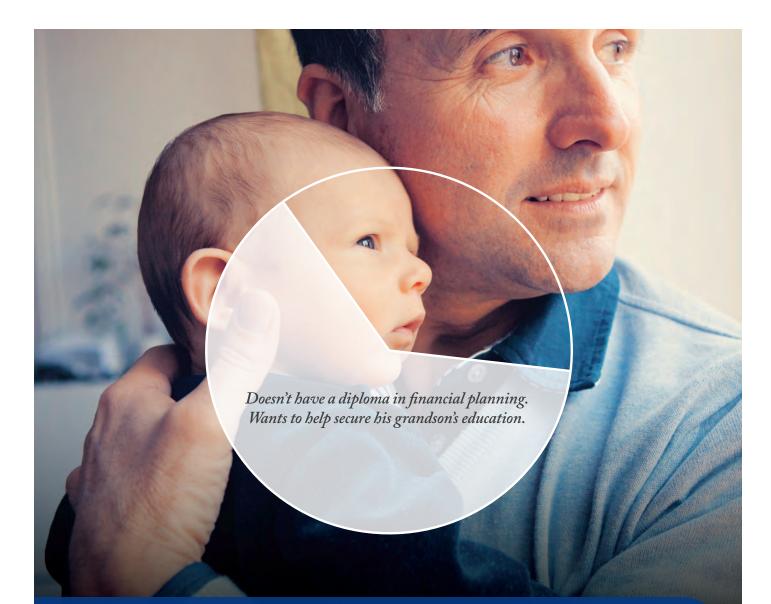
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ON THE MOVE

Food City recently announced the promotion of Drew Hembree to vice president of Traditional Advertising.

Hembree joined the Food City team in 1998, accepting a position as a courtesy clerk while attending high school. He continued to work for the company through high school and college, interning at the corporate level in both the Merchandising and Marketing departments. After college, Hembree completed



Drew Hembree

the company's assistant manager training program.

Throughout his career, Hembree has served in several key positions, including assistant store manager, social media manager, site analyst, category manager and director of Advertising, before assuming his current role as vice president of Traditional Advertising. His responsibilities include production of weekly television, print and radio advertisements, store level signage and oversight of the company's in-house Print Shop, in addition to a number of Marketing support roles.

Mitch Cox Companies last month welcomed its newly appointed chief financial officer, Gregory S. Wiggins. Wiggins joins the Mitch Cox Companies team with several years of experience in financial leadership. His most recent appointment was chief accounting officer at Carmike Cinemas, headquartered in Columbus, Ga. Before assuming his position at Carmike, Wiggins was an audit manager at Ernst & Young LLP, a "Big Four" public accounting firm.

Wiggins is a certified public accountant and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Commerce and Business Administration and a Master's in Accountancy, both from the University of Alabama.

As part of the shift in leadership at Mitch Cox Companies, Tracy Fleenor, who has served as chief financial officer since joining MCC in 1992, will assume the role of chief operating officer.

Two new directors have joined the Transportation Business Unit at Barge, Waggoner, Sumner and Cannon, Inc.

Jonathan Haycraft will manage the firm's roadway and bridge design services as Road and Bridge Director. During his career, Haycraft has led the design of multiple interchange projects, roundabout design, and complete street projects throughout Tennessee and the southeast. Havcraft was previously with Gresham Smith & Partners.



Jonathan Haycraft

He has served on the board of directors for the Tennessee Society of Professional Engineers (TSPE) Nashville Chapter, including as President. Haycraft is the 2013 TSPE Young Engineer of the Year and received the TSPE State Young Engineer of the Year recognition in the same year.

Mark Washing joins the firm as Director of Traffic Engineering Services. He has more than 30 years of experience in traffic engineering, Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) planning and design, and traffic signal systems, along with roadway and site lighting designs. Washing has worked throughout the southeastern United States planning, designing, and implementing these projects. Prior to joining Barge Waggoner, Washing was employed with Volkert Engineering.



Mark Washing

Washing currently serves on the Board of Directors as past president of the Intelligent Transportation Society of Tennessee. He is also a member of the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

2017 Pinnacle Award Winners Announced

The Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association honored the region's top tourism industry performers May 11 at the 20thAnnual Pinnacle Awards. Honorees are as follows:

Advertising and Promotions: Pinnacle Award Winners

Birthplace of Country Music Groundhog Day Campaign The High Road Agency

Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion Reveal Video Birthplace of Country Music

Discover Bristol Rebranding Campaign The High Road Agency

Discover Bristol Website **Bristol Convention & Visitors Bureau**

Gadsden Flag Tennessee Specialty License Plate Friends of Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park

Jonesborough Visitor Guide Town of Jonesborough Department of Tourism

Advertising and Promotions: Merit Award Winners Birthplace of Country Music Branding Video Birthplace of Country Music

Birthplace of Country Music Museum Commercial Birthplace of Country Music

Jonesborough Tourism Website Town of Jonesborough

SEE DEPARTMENTS, 32



Gregory S. Wiggins



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DEPARTMENTS, CONTINUED

Public Relations: Pinnacle Award Winners Battle at Bristol Social Media The High Road Agency

Integrated Public Relations Campaign for the World's Largest Football Game

Birthplace of Country Music, Bristol Convention & Visitors Bureau, Bristol Motor Speedway

Social Media for Main Street Jonesborough Main Street Jonesborough

Public Relations: Merit Award Winner Explore Downtown Johnson City Brand Launch Johnson City Development Authority

Special Event: Pinnacle Award Winners 20th Anniversary of the Commissioning of The USS Greeneville Submarine Tourism Department of Greene County Partnership

Battle on the State Line Kick-Off & Tailgate Bristol Convention & Visitors Bureau Jonesborough Chocolate Fest Jonesborough Area Merchants & Services Association

Special Event: Merit Award Winners AAU 7th Grade Girls Basketball Division II and III National Championships Visit Kingsport

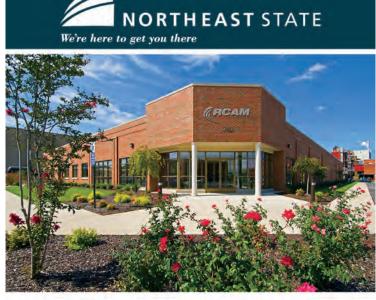
Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion Festival Guide The High Road Agency

Covered Bridge Celebration Elizabethton Carter County Chamber of Commerce

Erwin Elephant Revival Join Economic Development Board of Unicoi County for RISE Erwin

Johnson City Bootleg Bash Johnson City Development Authority and Johnson City Convention & Visitor's Bureau

SEE DEPARTMENTS, 34





The Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) is the branded outreach of Northeast State Community College. Focused on advanced manufacturing training, the programs and services offered through RCAM are designed to develop the 21st century workforce.

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DEPARTMENTS, CONTINUED

Jonesborough Yarn Exchange Radio Series Jonesborough Yarn Exchange

Liberty! The Saga of Sycamore Shoals Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park

Special Project: Pinnacle Award Winners

Birthplace of County Music Museum Airport Display The High Road Agency

Kingsport Libation Vacation Visit Kingsport

Southern Dozen – The 13th Ride Johnson City Convention & Visitor's Bureau

Tennessee Ernie Ford: A Life On Stage Special Exhibit Birthplace of Country Music

Special Project: Merit Award Winners Sensory Night Hands On! Regional Museum

Jonesborough Story Town App Town of Jonesborough McKinney Center

Tourism Congeniality Award Martin the GEICO Gecko

Tourism Volunteer Award Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club

Judge's Choice Southern Dozen – The 13th Ride Johnson City Convention & Visitor's Bureau

Jonesborough Visitor Guide Town of Jonesborough Department of Tourism

Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion Reveal Video Birthplace of Country Music

Platinum Pinnacle

Battle at Bristol Staff of Bristol Motor Speedway



MED BRIEFS

Wellmont, Virginia Highlands agree to increase nurse pool

The number of nurses available in the Tri-Cities labor pool will increase as the result of an agreement signed last month by representatives of Bristol Regional Medical Center and Virginia Highlands Community College. The agreement, which becomes effective with the 2017 academic year, will allow the college to admit 20 additional nursing students each year.

"The challenge of finding a sufficient supply of nurses is a nationwide topic, and we have engaged in many innovative approaches that are starting to bear fruit," Greg Neal, Bristol Regional's president said. "But we still have additional work ahead and are thrilled to have a like-minded higher education institution in Virginia Highlands that is just as focused on educating more nurses to meet patients' needs."

"We are delighted to partner with Bristol Regional Medical Center to enhance nursing education and, ultimately, health care in our region," Dr. Gene C. Couch Jr., Virginia Highlands' president said. "Hands-on instruction in a clinical setting is an important component of our program, and we're excited to work with Bristol Regional to provide the education our students need to become exceptional nurses."

To accomplish the goal of increasing the nursing staff, Virginia



Greg Neal, president of Bristol Regional Medical Center, and Dr. Gene C. Couch Jr., president of Virginia Highlands Community College, shake hands after signing the agreement between the two organizations. Photo by Scott Robertson

Highlands will provide faculty for all curriculum instruction, and Bristol Regional will be responsible for much of the clinical instruction. Wellmont will fund another part-time faculty member at Virginia Highlands who will help with skills and assessment courses and assist in the simulation lab housed at the college.



healthcare healthcare HEROES Business Journal orri-Cities Tennessee / Virginia

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

Frontier Health, Wellmont Health System, First Citizens Bank, Blue Cross/Blue Sheild of Tennessee and The Business Journal are proud to recognize dedicated individuals in the region's medical community who offer their services to assist others, displaying qualities of selflessness, compassion and loyalty. Past heroes have included firefighters, police officers, paramedics, physicians, nurses and volunteers whose accomplishments make a daily impact in our region.

Nominees come from all walks of life – any organization or person whose contribution has made a difference in health care. We thank you for helping us discover these extraordinary people by nominating them for the 2017 Health Care Hero and Cup of Kindness[®] Awards. In addition to recognizing general Health Care 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.

The 2017 Healthcare Heroes luncheon will be held July 21 at the Meadowview Conference Resort & Convention Center. Honorees attend free of charge. All other seats are \$40. To make reservations now, call 423.979.1301 and ask for Judy, or visit *bjournal.com* and click on the Healthcare Heroes link.









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Small businesses are important

By Congressman Phil Roe



The American Dream is built on an individual's ability to become entrepreneurs, take risks and build a small business that can thrive and grow. Last month, as we celebrated National Small Business Week, and as a former small business owner myself, I reflected on the many challenges these entrepreneurs face on a daily basis.

It is estimated that 99 percent of all businesses with employees in the United States are small businesses, which further underscores their importance to our economy. That's exactly why I make it a priority to visit small businesses across the First District of Tennessee to hear directly about their successes and challenges.

Did you know there are more than 29 million small businesses in the United States responsible for creating 63 percent of new jobs? According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, Tennessee small businesses employed 1.1 million people in 2014 and saw a 5 percent increase in employment in 2016. Every year we have an opportunity to celebrate the role small businesses play in America and, specifically, in East Tennessee.

But we are also facing a very significant challenge. According to research done by the Economic Innovation Group (EIG), small business creation has dropped significantly, and is becoming more heavily concentrated. Between the economic recovery from 1983-87, 491,600 businesses were added nationwide; from 2002-06, 271,100 firms were added; but from 2010-14, only 104,600 businesses were added nationwide. EIG also points out in their report that business creation in just five metropolitan areas – New York, Miami, Los Angeles, Houston, and Dallas - had the same amount of business creation as the rest of the United States combined. When so many of my friends and neighbors ask me why they don't see more signs of the economic recovery, this is why. During the Easter recess, I visited several businesses around the First District to learn about the work they are doing to produce more jobs, improve the economy, and quite frankly, where they are lacking support from the federal government. As your congressman, I believe one of the most important things I can do for small businesses is to ensure their needs are considered in any policies developed by Congress and the administration.

One of the most consistent things I hear from people who are thinking about taking the risk of starting their own business is that government regulations have made it too hard to get an idea off the ground. When government starts standing in the way of the American Dream, we need to rethink how our government acts, and I'm proud to be working with President Trump in significantly curtailing some of the most burdensome regulations that have been produced. We've already passed and signed into law 13 resolutions that cancel regulations from the previous administration. We're working to repeal Obamacare, which relies on government bureaucrats to manage health care, and replace it with a patientcentered, free-market alternative. And just this week, the Financial Services Committee began work on legislation to reform Dodd-Frank banking regulations, which have had the harmful effect of denying capital to many new small businesswomen and men.

Earlier this year, I also proudly cosponsored and supported H.R. 1101, the Small Business Health Fairness Act, which empowers small businesses and workers by allowing them to band together and offer coverage through association health plans. This legislation paves the way for a more competitive health care marketplace with lower costs for small businesses. Most small businesses, especially those in our region, work hard to provide competitive benefits to their employees. We should encourage them to continue doing this, not push employers into a system they cannot afford – forcing many of them to cut jobs and other benefits.

I am a proud supporter of small businesses in our country, especially those in Tennessee, and I will continue to support legislation in Congress to empower job creators in the private sector. Many of us know someone who owns or operates a small business, and I hope you'll join me in appreciating them and their contributions to our economy.

As always, feel free to contact my office at *roe.house.gov* if I can be of assistance to you or your family.



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