

# The Business Journal

of Tri-Cities Tennessee / Virginia

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## Alan Levine inducted into JA Business Hall of Fame

**Special Section:  
Higher Education**

Photo courtesy Junior Achievement of Tri-Cities, TN/VA

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Brandon Green, D.O.



Alison Herrig, CPNP

## Our pediatric orthopedic dream team

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If you would like more information or to schedule an appointment with Dr. Green, please call 423.431.2477.

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**COVER STORY**



**Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame**

Ballad Health Chairman, President and CEO Alan Levine becomes the latest to earn the honor, becoming the first individual to be the sole laureate in any given year.

Cover Photo courtesy Junior Achievement of Tri-Cities, TNVA

Office  
423.979.1301  
news@bjournal.com

Publisher  
William R. Derby  
bderby@bjournal.com  
423.979.1300

Co-Publisher  
Jeff Derby  
jderby@bjournal.com  
423.306.0104

Managing Editor  
Scott Robertson  
srobertson@bjournal.com  
423.767.4904

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

Richard G. Preston  
rgpreston@bjournal.com  
423.262.7760

Robin Williams  
rwilliams@bjournal.com  
423.794.6938

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



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Senior Vice President—Wealth Management  
Senior Portfolio Manager  
540-855-3346 [mike.kemp@ubs.com](mailto:mike.kemp@ubs.com)

### **N. Edward Link**

Senior Vice President—Wealth Management  
Senior Portfolio Manager  
540-855-3344 [eddie.link@ubs.com](mailto:eddie.link@ubs.com)

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# 40 Under FORTY

A SALUTE TO EMERGING STARS OF OUR COMMUNITY

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Are there rising stars in your company?  
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You can be a part of the recognition process by nominating a young businessperson who excels both professionally and in service to his or her community. It's never been easier to make your 40 Under Forty nominations. Just visit [40under.com](http://40under.com) and follow the instructions. All 40 Under Forty nomination materials are due no later than

August 17. Nominees must be 39 or younger as of October 19, 2018. Visit [40under.com](http://40under.com) for complete rules and requirements.

The 26th Annual 40 Under Forty Gala will be held at the Millennium Centre in Johnson City on Friday, October 19. Call 423.979.1300 for more information. Honorees attend at no charge.

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40 Under Forty honorees will be featured in the December issue of The Business Journal.  
Deadline for nominations is August 17, 2018. Nominate online at [40under.com](http://40under.com)

# Want the region to be more prosperous? Make it happen.



If you'd like insight into how a Hall of Fame caliber business leader thinks, look to the comments of Alan Levine, the 2018 Junior Achievement Hall of Fame laureate, regarding value. Levine says Junior Achievement taught him a key lesson: everything that presents an opportunity to generate value also presents an opportunity to create prosperity. The key is

realizing what you can do or make in which the market will see enough value to compensate you profitably.

Today, the political and business leaders of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia are realizing the potential profitability of creating a region-wide value proposition. The unified support for Aerospace Park (see pages 16-17) represents one example of that. Another example is the newly-discovered synergy of the Chambers of Commerce representing Bristol, Johnson City and Kingsport.

Beginning in 2018, the chairs of each Chamber (Jerry Caldwell, Andy Dietrich and Bob Feathers) sit on the boards of the other two. While each organization remains firm in its resolve to promote the business interests of its own city, a newfound realization of common purpose was recently given voice by Dietrich, the Johnson City chair.

"We know there is more to do to remain competitive here with those places that seek the same results we do," Dietrich said, listing, "good jobs, expansion of existing business and industry, new business growing our visitor industry, entrepreneurial friendly and quality of life that is second to none.

"And by the way," Dietrich added, "our competition is not anyone 15 miles from here – also known as Bristol and Kingsport. It is now Roanoke; Cleveland and Bradley County, Tennessee; Clarksville, Tennessee; and those cities of like size in South and North Carolina."

The three Chamber chairs have been in talks for months. "We knew we would be engaged in conversations that would have the potential of positioning us for the future where we tout the pluses we have separately, which when added together, gives a grand total of assets for businesses to remain here and come here," Dietrich said. "It's called regionalism."

Dietrich said the Chambers were discussing the creation of a tagline and/or logo that all three can use in creating an

over-arching brand, "that can distinguish us from our true competition."

To be sure, the concept of regionalism has raised hackles in the past, particularly among leaders who see themselves as doing well under a more splintered framework. Yet a regional approach to economic and community development need not be a threat to those who have prospered in the past. In fact, a well-planned, properly executed regional strategy should leverage the existing strengths of each community and company.

*The Business Journal* coverage map stretches from Greeneville, Tenn., in the west to Marion, Va., in the east. Every community in between has something to offer. Every business creates some value.

Taken as a whole, this region offers up outdoor recreation opportunities, industrial properties, commercial real estate and prime residential space. Why should we not encourage our business and government leaders to create a single identity to market the best of all those communities?

If every community that has spent time and money trying to lure business away from any other community in the region were to put those resources instead toward improving its own existing strengths and addressing its own weaknesses, the entire region would stand to benefit.

The Chamber chairs are not alone. Leaders who have a vision of what a unified region can accomplish are speaking out. From Levine and Dr. Brian Noland working to spread the word about the links between health, education and prosperity to Mark Costa and David Golden touting innovation and common purpose. From Lottie Ryans, Scott Niswonger and Travis Staton working to create pathways for today's students to become tomorrow's dynamic workforce to John Speropolus and our own publisher, Bill Derby, promoting the idea of reuniting the Kingsport and Johnson City MSAs.

These leaders all realize the importance of something else Levine says in his Junior Achievement bio (pages 20-23): "Make it happen. Learn as much as you can, take that knowledge, and don't look to make excuses for why you can't get ahead."

Make it happen.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Niswonger".

# Bridging the workforce gap

By Travis W. Staton

Each day, as president and CEO of the United Way of Southwest Virginia, I have the privilege to hear from our region's employers, schools and local governments. For quite some time I was taken aback at the gap between our public and private sectors and learned that local employers, educational institutions, and youth live in different worlds and have essentially different perspectives.



Earlier this year, I learned that school systems have been selecting from a list of more than 600 credentials, but, often, the credentials offered do not align with the needs of local employers. Even though more than 9,600 credentials were earned by students during the last school year, local data shows that nearly 3,000 youth ages 16-19 are not enrolled in school or working in our region.

This information may lead one to ask: did the employers and schools ever sit down together to discuss these credentials and which ones are most valuable to the employers? Which is not a shocker, as national reports show that across the country, only a third of employers report ever communicating with local schools.

The gaining of these insights continues to affirm to me that the United Way of Southwest Virginia has zeroed in on the right solutions.

Listening to our investors, both community members and local employers, we brought together the region's leaders with more than 200 public and private partners across 17 school systems, 86 middle and high schools, to create the region's first regional youth workforce development program. Ignite, a program developed by the United Way of Southwest Virginia, is a commonsense initiative sparking career interest in the next generation of Southwest Virginia's workforce through two simple strategies: career awareness and skill development.

Already, in the first year of implementation, Ignite has received high honors, from being recognized by former Virginia Governor McAuliffe for preparing students for the new Virginia Economy to just recently being referred to as a model for the entire commonwealth from state secretariat level positions.

During the program's first year, United Way provided state of the art web-based software for self-exploration and career

planning to all 29,000 6th–12th grade students in our region to heighten career awareness. We took numerous educators on local employer worksite tours to aid teachers in understanding the skills needed by local employers and to create project-based learning activities based on those needs. Then we created a regional Careers Expo for Youth where every seventh grader in Southwest Virginia learned first-hand from local employers about the jobs available right here at home.

In the area of skill development, Ignite has created several new partnerships, including one with the US Department of Labor in offering a soft skills curriculum, Skills to Pay the Bills. We have trained educators to teach area students the skills they need to succeed in the workplace like communication and teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving, and the importance of attitude and professionalism. Secondly, we partnered with Virginia Tech's Cooperative Extension to provide real life financial simulations to all area 8th graders to learn the importance of earning a paycheck and smart money management.

And now, through a new partnership with GO Virginia, United Way of Southwest Virginia is creating a plan for credential alignment, ensuring that education and training programs in high school match employer demand. This partnership also provides resources to develop an internship component to connect a student's learning to on-the-job experience. As research tells us, youth who participate in work-based learning are more likely to do better in school, attend college or go to work compared to their peers, and as the Annie E. Casey foundation states, "...in the end, work itself is the strongest program."

Through these combined regional efforts, United Way of Southwest Virginia is bridging the gap by creating a talent pipeline that prepares the next generation for the jobs of tomorrow, supplying our local employers with skilled workers, building a robust competitive economy.

As we embark on building the internship components of Ignite, I invite our region's employers to be a part of the solution. On September 26, we will again convene regional leaders at the Operation Tomorrow's Workforce Leaders Breakfast in Abingdon, Va. During this time we will roll out additional plans of how you can be involved. Although these strategies sound quite simple, it will take all of us working together, united.

*Travis Staton is president and CEO of the United Way of Southwest Virginia. He can be reached at [tstaton@unitedway-swva.org](mailto:tstaton@unitedway-swva.org).*

# Home sales increase, inventory at record lows

Buyers snapped up homes in April at a pace that is barely allowing new listings to sustain an already historic low inventory.

Northeast Tennessee Association of Realtors (NETAR) President Aaron Taylor said the 11-county region monitored by the association's Trends Report had 3.4 months of inventory at the end of April. Only two city markets had more than a three-month supply of homes for sale. "Six months of inventory is the benchmark for normal market conditions – something we've seen only twice in the past 13 months."

"There were 928 new listings in April and 878 new accepted contracts," Taylor said. "A 2.2 percent listing growth rate won't appreciably improve an overall inventory already 23.8 percent lower than it was last year," he added. "You can get a better picture of the situation if you compare the current inventory to what it was during the same month in 2016 – a period when inventory was typical for our region." At the end of April, there were 2,500 active listings compared to 4,088 in April 2016.

There were 544 closings on single-family resales in April, up 5.4 percent from April last

year. So far this year closings are 8.8 percent better than the first four months of last year. Closings on townhomes and condominium sales totaled 47, down 22 from April last year. Year-to-date there have been 158 closings, 14 fewer than the first four months of last year.

April's single-family average sales price was \$165,790, down \$3,764 from last year. The year-to-date price trend is 6.9 percent (\$10,992) better than last year. The average condo sales price was \$140,168, up 3.9 percent from April last year but the year-to-date trend is down 5 percent.

Prices haven't dramatically increased despite the inventory shortage, so far. "Our big issue is availability, not affordability," Taylor said. One of our biggest concerns is buyers – especially first-time buyers – will become frustrated with the availability of the product on the market and decide to continue renting or to wait for better inventory conditions. Simply put, we need more listings, and the market is prime for owners who have considered selling but are still on the sidelines."

## Here's a capsule look at local market trends based on the year-to-date city and county single-family resales and average prices compared to the first four months of last year:

### CITY MARKETS

Kingsport: Sales 231, up 37. Avg. price - \$173,316, up \$7,149.  
 Johnson City: Sales, 228, down 5. Avg. price - \$210,895, down \$14,403.  
 Bristol, TN: Sales 87, down 2. Avg. price - \$149,882, up \$6,539.  
 Greeneville: Sales 65, up 9. Avg. price \$134,294, up \$4,924.  
 Bristol, VA: Sales 56, up 7. Avg. price - \$115,458, up \$10,177.  
 Erwin/Unicoi: Sales 48, up 1. Avg. price - \$150,758, up \$24,265.  
 Elizabethton: Sales 47, up 1. Avg. price - \$121,614, up \$9,497.

### COUNTY MARKETS

Sullivan: Sales 570, up 60. Avg. price - \$166,638, up \$7,826.  
 Washington, TN: Sales 482, up 4. Avg. price \$215,364, up \$13,537.  
 Greene: Sales 204, up 24. Avg. price \$149,806, up \$8,558.  
 Hawkins: Sales 173, up 24. Avg. price \$154,511, up \$16,731.  
 Carter: Sales 150, up 1. Avg. price \$135,396 up \$6,291.  
 Washington, VA: Sales 126, up 10. Avg. price \$179,838, up \$17,842.  
 Wise: 56, up 10. Avg. price \$105,514, up \$6,308.  
 Johnson: Sales 41, up 18. Avg. price \$214,505, up \$105,043.  
 Scott: Sales 32, down 3. Avg. price \$80,051, down \$31,651.  
 Lee: Sales 14, up 3. Avg. price \$79,503, up \$8,266.



*Johnson County's year-to-date high average sales price change and Scott County's low are both residual effects of outlier sales. NETAR counts city sales as those in high school zones. City sales and price data are included in the county totals.*



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The Pinnacle Awards Class of 2018. PHOTOS BY SCOTT ROBERTSON



Brenda Whitson receives the Tourism Leader of the Year Award from Tennessee Commissioner of Tourism Kevin Triplett.

## NETTA presents 2018 Pinnacle Awards

The Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association feted the region's top achievers in the tourism industry at the 21st Annual Pinnacle Awards May 10. Tennessee Commissioner of Tourism Kevin Triplett delivered the keynote address and presented the Tourism Leader of the Year Award to Brenda Whitson of the Johnson City Convention & Visitors Bureau. Other honorees included Tim Bar, tournament director for the 2017 Professional Disc Golf Association as Volunteer of the Year and Stephen Callahan of Tennessee Hills Distillery as the Rising Star. The High Road Agency won the Partnership Award, nominated by the Birthplace of Country Music.



Rob Bunch of High Road Digital receives the Partnership Award from Mironda White of Bristol Motor Speedway.



Triplett delivers the keynote address at the 2018 Pinnacle Awards at Meadowview Conference Resort & Convention Center.

# Monro completes purchase of Free Service Tire Company

By Scott Robertson

Monro, Inc., the nation's largest independently owned and operated auto service chain last month closed the purchase of 99-year-old Johnson City, Tenn.-based Free Service Tire Company. Monro will keep the Free Service branding in place along with 96 percent of the existing Free Service employees. The transaction closed May 13, and is expected to add approximately \$47 million in annualized sales, representing a sales mix of 15 percent service and 85 percent tires to Monro.

"This acquisition expands our footprint in the South, while providing Monro with an even stronger platform for further growth in these markets," said Brett Ponton, president and CEO of Monro. "Equally important, we are extremely pleased to welcome these outstanding teammates and locations to our company, and look forward to working with the entire Free Service Tire team."

Free Service Tire Company operates 10 retail tire and service centers in Tennessee along with two commercial service centers and two tire retreading centers as well as four wholesale tire distribution centers in Tennessee and in Roanoke, Va., and Asheville, N.C.

"Lots of times people get into a situation where they have to sell a business. For us it was a decision, though a very hard decision," said Lewis Wexler Jr., who will transition from CEO of Free Service to a consultancy with Monro. "It was something we had to think about long and hard. This wasn't something we had been planning on doing for a long time."

"We had thought maybe ten years from now or somewhere way out in the future when I was in my mid-60s that maybe my brother (Harrison Wexler, who will transition to a position with Monro) would buy me out, but we had never talked about selling the company. It was something that caught me by surprise."

That having been said, there appeared to be headwinds on the horizon for companies like Free Service, Wexler said. "There's already been a lot of consolidation. TBC, a big company in the tire space and Michelin merged at the beginning of the year. I saw that and I said, 'Wow, that's a big change in our business.' A big competitor, Tire Discounters, announced they were going to move into the Knoxville market, which is our strongest market. Several companies like ours have been purchased. There were a lot of signs that a wave of change was coming. And I've seen more change in the last year than in any previous five years."

Tax changes at the end of 2017 made it more beneficial for larger companies, like Monro, to consider making new acquisitions, Wexler said. "I've been in a buying group with Monro for many years. So, around the beginning of this year we started talking."



(L-R) Lewis Wexler, Sr. Susan Wexler, Harrison Wexler, Lewis Wexler, Jr.

The Free Service operation will remain, "pretty much intact," Wexler said. "The name will remain Free Service Tire Company for the foreseeable future. The buildings will remain the same. It is an opportunity for them to give our employees and our customers a better buying experience and better resources."

Certainly in a company of 14,000 employees, there will be more opportunities for advancement, Wexler said. "With our company the ladder wasn't quite as tall."

There were obvious synergies between the two companies, Wexler said. "They have a large retail store chain with many different formats and our format fits that. In recent years they acquired several other companies that have commercial businesses and our company has a commercial business. The same holds true for the wholesale business. So, they were able to buy our entire company instead of just pieces of it."

Though almost all of Free Service's employees will transition to Monro, a handful will not. Wexler said those few individuals are corporate staff whose positions' work is already done at Monro's corporate office. "We've worked with each of them to try to set up a situation to bridge their current situation to a new opportunity and environment." Monro has also guaranteed no Free Service employee will make less money this year than last, Wexler said.

With more than 1,160 owned stores, 98 franchise locations, and nine wholesale locations across 27 states, Monro has grown into one of the leading automotive service and tire companies in the country, generating record revenue of \$1.12 billion in fiscal 2018. **BJ**

# RMC Advanced Technologies locating U.S. headquarters in Phipps Bend

French Canadian company will also begin manufacturing in Hawkins County

By Scott Robertson

A Quebec-based advanced manufacturing company will locate its U.S. headquarters and establish a manufacturing facility in Surgoinsville. RMC Advanced Technologies officials made the announcement May 16. The composite components manufacturer will invest \$7 million and create 54 new jobs in Hawkins County.

“At the end of the day, Surgoinsville will become our head office,” Denis Bertrand, president of Sigma Industries, the parent company of RMC, said. “It will become the base of our expansion in Tennessee. We have a multiple-year plan starting today in Surgoinsville.”

RMC, a subsidiary of Sigma Industries Inc., produces and sells composite components. The company offers products for the heavy-duty truck, coach, transit and bus, machinery, agriculture and wind energy markets.

“This location in the U.S. represents an important strategic milestone for us,” Bertrand said. “It is the first step in our strategy to grow our operations in the U.S. market. In essence, it will allow us to better serve existing customers while providing us with the opportunity to grow our business in a market of significant size. Furthermore, we are proud to be in a position to serve our transit industry customers with Buy America compliant products.

“Here we will be closer to the customer base we have today,” Bertrand said, noting that RMC serves companies including Volvo Trucks in the New River Valley just up Interstate 81 in Southwest Virginia. “We also serve Freightliner, GLG and Paccar –the Kenworth division and the Peterbilt division. This puts us within 200 to 250 miles of our major customers. This also gives us the possibility of developing another 60-70 new customers in different industries, either on the automotive side or the windmill side. There is also opportunity on the aerospace side with Airbus and Boeing in the Carolinas. The good thing for us is that we manufacture 80 percent of all composites. We do pultrusions. We do injections. We do SNC. So the opportunities are great in this part of the world for us.”

The RMC manufacturing operations in Hawkins County will be highly automated, Bertrand said, requiring a highly trained workforce.



Tennessee Commissioner of Economic and Community Development Bobby Rolfe, right, and Sigma Industries, Inc., CEO Denis Bertrand flank an artist’s rendering of the Surgoinsville spec building. Clay Walker, Networks Sullivan Partnership CEO is at far left.

Citing the presence of a Tennessee Center for Applied Technology less than a mile away, and already having met with Jeff McCord of Northeast State Community College’s Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing, Bertrand said, “I had a great discussion last night on how this area with the community college and technical center will help our organization go to the next step. This was really, really important to us.”

Larry Elkins, chairman of the Hawkins County Industrial Board said, “A company like this was exactly what we envisioned to locate in the spec building in Phipps Bend Industrial Park. The quality of jobs RMC will bring to Hawkins County speaks volumes about the company and what it will provide to our community.”

“This is going to be heavy in robotics,” said Clay Walker, CEO of Networks Sullivan Partnership. “This is going to be the kind of company that when we want to get our kids excited about manufacturing, we’re going to bring them here. When they see all the robots running all around the floor, all the high-tech, and the working conditions, they’re going to say, ‘Whoa! That’s manufacturing? Where do I sign up for it?’”

The shell building RMC will occupy was built on spec several years ago. It will require some work to be ready, Bertrand said. “We are looking, I would say, by the end of this year to have the floor in and to relocate some equipment by Christmas. The intent is to start up full production by the end of the first quarter of next year.”

The company plans to start hiring in mid-November, Bertrand said. "We'll get the training programs set up with the technical college people and have our people coming in January and February."

"We have been looking for years on expanding our headquarters," Bertrand continued. "We have one in Canada which has been there for 40 years. We were looking to expand not only the management and the executives into the US, but also the hiring from the US. So having a headquarters here opens that opportunity. If you just have a plant in place, you can get great people, but we're looking at getting an executive staff here to really drive the customer base around this area."

The road from Quebec to Surgoinsville was somewhat circuitous. It led through Nashville by way of Lori Odom, an economic developer with the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce who had previously worked with RMC's site selection firm, Creek & Rogers. "It was all about existing buildings for RMC," Jim Rogers, principal at Creek & Rogers, said. "Lori put together a notebook of existing buildings in Tennessee and this site was in that notebook."

Juli Creek, principal at Creek & Rogers, said North Carolina was particularly unimpressive in its inability to function as a cohesive unit, but that the hand-off from the Nashville Chamber to Networks was seamless. "We started working on this in June of last year. We were here on site in September, and Team Tennessee is the reason."

"Team Tennessee worked together on this," Rogers agreed. "We looked at sites in three states and not all of them worked together as well as Tennessee did. So even though this was not Nashville, Lori was happy to say, 'there's a great building in Hawkins County.' Connecting to our client's customer who's right along Interstate 81 in Virginia, that proximity brought us here."

Another key to bringing RMC to Hawkins County was the availability of additional land next to the existing building. "At the time, this was more building than we thought we needed," Rogers said. "Now," Creek added, "it's probably less."

"But," Rogers said, "we can double the size of the building immediately if we need to do that. That's a real advantage here."

Creek & Rogers serves primarily Canadian companies, and Northeast Tennessee economic developers hope to be able to leverage this deal into other Canada-Tennessee connections. Sigma Industries Inc. was founded in 2005 and is based in Saint-Ephrem-de-Beauce, Quebec, Canada.

"I want to welcome RMC to Hawkins County and thank the company for choosing to locate its U.S. headquarters and manufacturing facility in Surgoinsville," Tennessee Commissioner of Economic & Community Development Director Bobby Rolfe said. "It means a great deal that another international-based company has chosen our state for its new operations. Tennessee is home to more than 70 Canadian-owned companies that employ approximately 8,000 Tennesseans and we appreciate RMC for creating 54 new jobs in our state and Surgoinsville." 

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# Southwest Virginia Economic Forum focuses on “Talent”

By Scott Robertson



Virginia Secretary of Commerce & Trade Brian Ball addresses the forum. PHOTOS COURTESY UVA-WISE



Recipients of KIVA loans gather to discuss their entrepreneurial success.

The 2018 Southwest Virginia Economic Forum May 17 at the University of Virginia at Wise promised a great deal of informative content. Listed on the agenda were a panel discussion on what communities in neighboring states are doing to drive economic development, a talk by Travis Staton on efforts to bridge the gap between education and employers in Southwest Virginia, a discussion of workforce needs in the advanced manufacturing sector and a keynote speech from Governor Ralph Northam.

The day got off to a slower start than had been hoped for when Northam’s flight from Richmond was socked in by fog, leaving Secretary of Commerce and Trade Brian Ball to deliver the keynote. Ball admitted to being a neophyte student of Southwest Virginia, but told the audience of business and education leaders the Northam administration would, “work hard and be here a lot.”

“All of us (in the Northam administration) share this commitment to do good things in Southwest Virginia,” Ball said. At the same time, Ball worked to manage expectations of what that commitment might produce. Using a baseball metaphor, he said that rather than swinging for home runs, Southwest Virginia should be aiming for “singles and doubles.”

The afternoon keynote speech by Cheryl Cran, CEO of Evolutionary Business Solutions Inc., was titled, “The Future of Work is Now! Are You Ready?”

Cran encouraged the audience to be willing to take new approaches in dealing with talent. She told an anecdote from her career as a banker in Canada. She managed a branch that was robbed, “ten times in a year, by the same two guys.” Every day there was a robbery, Cran said, the day’s workflow was destroyed. So, Cran said, she instituted a new policy in which she started giving the same orders the robbers had been giving as

soon as they appeared. “I told everybody to get down on the floor and I told the robbers to go ahead and take the money. I even offered them donuts on the way out,” Cran said. That strategy, Cran said, minimized the disruption in the workday, allowing her staff to return to normalcy quicker.

As Cran was making a point about the need for businesses to be “disruption tolerant,” a member of the audience passed out, causing a call of “is there a doctor in the house?” Cran told organizers of the event she was ending her remarks at that point and left the stage.

Perhaps the most inspiring moments of the day came during the presentations by several Southwest Virginia entrepreneurs who have received funding from the KIVA loan program. Kiva.org loans are crowd-funded, low interest loans available online to entrepreneurs who make a convincing case.

Stephen Curd, owner of Lavelle Manufacturing, a clothing design and manufacturing company in Glade Spring, told attendees that an \$8,000 loan allowed him to buy machinery and hire two part-time employees to bring hand-made clothing production back to the community. “Our plan,” Curd said, “is to grow our business to be able to offer jobs in the area at a fair wage thus starting the resurgence of small manufacturing back in the South and in the USA.”

Steven Harris, owner of Appalachian Drafting, discussed the success of his firm, which creates ultra-accurate 3D models of construction projects allowing clients to program automatic welding processes. The company is now doing work on projects in major markets.

The 2019 forum has already been scheduled for May 15 at UVA-Wise. [BJ](#)

# Science Applications International to open service center in Dickenson County

A Virginia Information Technologies Agency's (VITA) contract with Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) will create approximately 40 information technology (IT) service desk jobs in Clintwood by this fall. "I am pleased that this partnership will create 40 new jobs and have a significant economic impact in the region," said Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, in announcing the deal. "In addition to delivering services critical to the daily operation of state government, these jobs will be key to helping the Commonwealth modernize its technology infrastructure and support the changing IT needs of our citizens, businesses and visitors."

SAIC was selected to serve as VITA's multisourced services integrator (MSI), which means the company will coordinate efforts of several suppliers providing IT infrastructure services. Those include messaging, mainframe, security, end-user, server/storage and voice/video/network services. VITA will continue to provide governance and oversight of the MSI as it coordinates, monitors and reports on IT infrastructure services.

SAIC is a premier technology integrator in the technical, engineering, intelligence and enterprise IT markets headquartered in Reston, Virginia, with approximately 15,000 employees nationwide. SAIC currently has more than 3,000 employees in Virginia focused on major projects in Stafford County, Dahlgren and Hampton Roads with the U.S. Navy and the Department of Defense. Among its other high-profile customers are NASA, the State Department and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"These positions are vital to state government," Virginia Secretary of Administration Keyanna Conner added. "Staff in these jobs will support over 55,000 state employees who have questions or need assistance with IT as they serve citizens of the Commonwealth. Opening this service center also helps advance Governor Ralph Northam's number one priority—strengthening Virginia's economy and bringing quality jobs to the Commonwealth."

"This project is an exciting win for Dickenson County and Southwest Virginia, which continues to grow its technology workforce and boasts ever-expanding high-speed broadband and 4G wireless access," said Secretary of Commerce and Trade Brian Ball. "SAIC will be a valuable employer in Virginia's e-Region and advance the region's position as a leader in this critical 21st-century industry." 



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Mark Canty poses with Aerospace Park in the background. PHOTO BY SCOTT ROBERTSON

## Tri-Cities Airport: Marketing Aerospace Park

Earth has been turned on site, now the marketers are moving heaven and earth to find tenants

By Scott Robertson

**T**he effort to bring the first tenants to the aerospace industry-targeted park on the south side of the main runway at Tri-Cities airport is a multi-faceted affair. After all, when one invests just shy of \$20 million in creation of a park to attract high-paying jobs and capital investment, one doesn't just take out a want ad.

The broadest effort the airport is making is to market Northeast Tennessee as a region where a viable aerospace cluster already exists (thus proving to potential tenants that an aerospace-industry-ready workforce also exists). Drilling down closer to the target, the airport is targeting specific companies. That effort includes partnerships with existing economic development organizations. Networks Sullivan Partnership is by far the most active, as the airport is located in Sullivan County. However, the Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership, the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TDEC) and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) all play active roles. "We're reminding our state and larger regional organizations that we have this product," says Patrick Wilson, airport director. "That allows us to go with them together after some specific projects."

### Like it's 1999

When the three cities and two counties in the Sullivan/Washington County corridor voted separately to back a bond issue to help fund the project last year, the few dissenting voices (there were two negative votes among all five governing bodies) worried that the project might

have been underthought and overly speculative.

In truth, the project planning goes back to 1999, when the airport's governing body, then known as the Tri-Cities Airport Commission, drew up a master facilities plan. "That plan identified what is now known as Aerospace Park as an area for 'aviation-related industrial development,'" Wilson says. The airport has been making facilities improvements to make the park more accessible since. "The first phase of the taxiway on that side of the airport went in in 2001," Wilson says.

That 17-year-old taxiway is key because it directly links Aerospace Park to the main runway. That connection is one of the greatest selling points the park has against competing aerospace development projects throughout the Southeast.

"Our focus is aerospace, but it is further narrowed down to aerospace companies that need runway access," says Mark Canty, director of the Free Trade Zone and business development for the airport. "So, a parts manufacturer, we would probably not place them in Aerospace Park. We're reserving that space for businesses that need to use the runway. One of the prospects we're working with now needs 50-60 acres. So, it's a big advantage to have a big contiguous site like ours, all with taxiway frontage."

### Like it's 2018

Today, Aerospace Park includes 21 ready-to-occupy, certified acres in addition to the 140 acres being leveled. Canty has already been marketing that space, and he's constantly ready to pitch the

property. “Geographically it’s great, between the population centers of Miami and New York – the whole east coast, really. Tennessee is a right-to-work state, so that helps. The weather is a plus, the climate creates surprisingly few snow days here at the airport. Just being in the Southeast, where a lot of the automotive industry has moved is good, because a lot of the skillsets from automotive apply to aviation. A lot of good things come together to create a synergy here, and we have a good opportunity to take advantage of that.”

Canty’s enthusiasm is important, because the airport eschews mass marketing in favor of personal connections. “We made the decision early on to work on establishing relationships within the industry, targeting potential prospects,” Canty says. “So, we decided we would do a lot of trade shows, get out and meet those people face-to-face and try to spread the word about Aerospace Park.”

The airport and Networks have, for the last few years, split the cost of attending the MRO Americas show, the largest show dedicated to companies that do maintenance, repair and overhaul of aircraft. “MRO Americas draws MRO companies from around the world,” Canty says. “We typically will sponsor a booth and have an ad in the trade publication to highlight Aerospace Park. It’s our best opportunity to meet these companies on a one-on-one basis.”

“Networks is a tremendous partner,” Canty says. “They step up to the plate even when we don’t ask them to. They’ve sent three different people to MRO Americas. Also, Richard Blevins from Northeast State typically goes with us. We get a ton of questions about aviation maintenance education because there’s a national shortage of technicians. Richard speaks that language better than we do.”

Canty also attends the National Business Aviation Association’s annual meeting. “We typically don’t display there, just because it’s so huge. It may be the largest aviation conference in the world and airports don’t stand out as much there.” Attending that conference is more for industry intelligence than actual marketing, Canty says. “It’s a great place to hear industry announcements. It’s a great place to just walk the floor to find somebody new who may be interested.”

The airport has also begun displaying at another industry show, Cargo Facts. “It’s a conference dedicated to a growing sector, which is the passenger-to-freighter (P2F) industry. They take 737s, 747s and 777s out of passenger service, strip out the seats, put tracks in and turn it into a freighter.”

That show yielded a prospect who visited the airport, showing interest in both MRO and P2F conversion possibilities. “So clearly that’s a promising area for us as far as targeting prospects,” Canty says.

Other prospects have also expressed varying levels of interest, based on the marketing efforts to date, Canty says. “We’ve had conversations with a particular airline maintenance provider, for instance. They’re expanding and they’ve placed facilities throughout the country and they’re currently looking in the Southeast. There’s nothing imminent there, but we are on



TCA receives grant funding from the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development. PHOTO BY DAVE ONGIE

the cusp of having the activity there they would need to justify putting a facility here. We have a couple of other MRO providers, one in the state of Florida we regularly are in contact with.”

Other prospects have come from LinkedIn connections, Canty says. “Two of what I would consider to be the most solid prospects have actually visited Aerospace Park and have done regional tours. Each of those has asked us to visit them out of town, one at their headquarters and another at the home base of their US operations because they are a European company that has yet to establish a North American facility.”

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Business Hall of Fame



Alan Levine

# 2018 Business Hall of Fame Laureate Alan Levine

***Where there is no vision, the people perish.***  
**-Proverbs 29:18**

Those who know and have done business with Alan Levine are not surprised to see Proverbs 29:18 on a plaque just outside his office. Levine is known throughout the region as the man whose vision took Mountain States Health Alliance and Wellmont Health System - two business rivals with a long history of sometimes unproductive competition - and created Ballad Health, the region's largest employer and one of the largest employers in Tennessee. That vision, Levine says, is guided by faith – a faith that has allowed him to build success born from loss.

“I remember one night we were at my middle sister’s band concert and my mother stood up to stretch and, my father looked up and asked her where she was going, and she said she felt a little dizzy,” Levine says. “The next thing I knew my mother had fallen down the bleachers. There was a big commotion and a lot of chaos and I just remember the last thing I saw when I walked out, I looked over and saw my mother’s arm hanging down.”

Losing his mother to a brain aneurism at such a young age shaped Alan’s life from that point on. As a boy, he says he blamed the doctors and hospital who could not save her. As a man, he chose to help those in a similar situation.

“The career that I chose was largely because of what had happened to me at that young age,” Levine says. “In fact, I am proud that here in the Tri-Cities that Johnson City Medical Center is now a comprehensive stroke center, the only one between Knoxville and Richmond...If those had existed when my mother became ill, her life would have been saved. That really informed a lot of who I was.”

As a young student, Levine was gifted, but undisciplined. That lack of discipline was remedied when he entered military school. In his first term in the highly structured environment, Alan made straight A’s for the first time in his life, discovering how different his world could be if success were not merely a goal, but an expectation. “I was expected to exercise discipline in my studies and in my personal habits and I became a cadet officer in my first year there. I was only there for two years and graduated as a lieutenant, was a company commander. You learn a lot about leadership, giving out commands, and using discretion in exercising leadership.”



Laura and Alan Levine

Levine attended the University of Florida, beginning a mutually beneficial relationship that continues to this day. He serves on the Board of Governors for the State University System of Florida, having just been reappointed for a new seven-year term by Florida’s Governor. He chairs Florida’s Higher Education Coordinating Council and also served on the Board of Trustees of his alma mater, the University of Florida. It was there Levine learned about public service. He was elected treasurer of the student body and later ran for president. He might have won that office, had it not been for a cat.

“This other guy ran his cat for president, Gibby the cat, and this was a big joke. The base of my support was the fraternity sorority system. Of course, fraternity and sorority people thought it was really cool that a cat was running for student body president so they showed up and started voting for him. So, I won the first round of voting, but the cat got just enough votes to throw it into a runoff between me and another guy and I lost in the run off.”

Levine has been a devoted friend of dogs ever since. But the loss of that student body president race proved to be a blessing in disguise for him.

“A lot of folks took notice of my campaign including some leaders at a company called Hospital Corporation of America and they knew that I was pursuing a career in hospital administration,” Levine remembers. “They reached out and asked if I would be interested in doing my internship with them and I ended up doing a residency at HCA in Tampa.”

Levine says his mentor at HCA taught him the importance of balancing being an effective administrator with giving back to the community. He encouraged Levine to run for the Florida House of Representatives. In 1996, Levine won the Republican primary. While he lost to the Democrat incumbent, he also met another up-and-coming leader named Jeb Bush, who instantly became one of Alan’s strongest supporters.

“Thankfully he didn’t win that race because it allowed him to get back in business and build an incredible career, part of which I had a chance to work with him on,” Bush remembers.

In addition to being the starting point for a life-long friendship between Levine and Bush, that election loss created one other blessing. Had Levine won that race, he would never have met his wife, Laura.

“I remember when I saw her I knew she was the one that I was going to marry,” Levine says. “I was meeting with her in my office at the hospital and I got distracted and she said, ‘you know Mr. Levine, they do make medication for that.’ She was probably thinking ‘oh goodness, I just told the chief operating officer of the hospital that he needs medication.’ I was thinking, ‘wow, what a great lady.’”

Laura was a widow when she met Levine, having lost her first husband, a heroic firefighter and paramedic when her two children, Terry and Katy were nine and six years old. Levine fell in love with the entire family. “I remember telling them I wanted to marry their mom,” Levine says. “They both looked at me and said ‘can we call you dad now?’”

When Bush became governor of Florida, he hired Levine. “(Alan) was my deputy chief of staff as well as being the secretary of ACA, which is the agency that handles nursing homes, a lot of regulation in the healthcare space as well as the Medicaid program,” Bush says. “I got to serve as governor of the state at a time when policy implementation was rewarded politically. I wanted people that were smarter than me and people that were focused on reform. I was truly blessed to have him by my side and we did a lot of big things because of the initiatives that Alan took.”

Before Levine left the Bush administration to take a position as CEO of the fifth largest public hospital system in the United States, the North Broward Hospital District, he and the governor had led the passage of not only medical malpractice reform, but also the most sweeping reforms of Medicaid in the history of the Federal Medicaid Program. After two years at North Broward, Levine was recruited by Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal to serve as his health secretary and senior



Company Commander Levine in high school



The Levines provide foster care for abandoned dogs, who in turn provide stress relief to Alan and Laura.



Alan Levine with President George Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush



Alan Levine discusses policy with Florida Governor Jeb Bush

health advisor. The first week Levine was there, a New Orleans police officer was shot, and Levine got a call from the mayor.

“He said, ‘Mr. Secretary, last night one of our police officers in New Orleans was murdered and the guy who murdered her – his name was Bobby Bernal. Bobby Bernal was released last week from one of your state mental health institutions that you are responsible for. This is your problem. Welcome to Louisiana.’”

Levine proposed major sweeping reforms in the state’s mental health system. After the reforms were passed, Levine was named an honorary Cajun.

If the Bobby Bernal crisis and post-Hurricane Katrina rebuilding of the state health system were the frying pan, Levine’s next career move, joining a hospital chain called HMA, was the fire. Levine had been at HMA about two months when he was notified the U.S. Justice Department had issued two subpoenas to look into HMA’s business practices and that 60 Minutes was planning to do an in-depth story about the company related to allegations that predated Levine’s time with the company. The chairman of the board and CEO asked Levine if he would be the company’s on-air spokesman in the 60 Minutes piece and lead the company’s response effort. Once Levine had been convinced the company had not systematically done anything wrong, he agreed.

“I remember going on 60 Minutes,” Levine says, “and that was a very trying time. In the middle of all that, a hedge fund decided to take out our board and entered into a consent campaign to take our board out. On the way out the door, the board decided to sell the company. The CEO of the company left in the middle of all that to go run a mission for his church.”

With the mass departures, Alan and a few other colleagues were left to run a publicly traded Fortune 500 company that had essentially been left for dead. “That was probably the hardest time in my whole career,” Levine says. “Through it all, I will say that there are a few people you thank along the way or a few people that you take for granted along the way, the most important of which is your spouse. As I was dealing with all this growth in my career and all these things that I was facing, there was this woman at home who really kept me grounded and she got the

worst of all of it. She is just an amazing lady. I don’t deserve her, but I am thankful for her.”

As had happened before in Levine’s life, from a dark time, opportunity emerged. As HMA’s situation was becoming more difficult, Mountain States Health Alliance began looking to replace the only CEO it had ever had.

A recruiter remembered Levine’s love of the Appalachian Mountains (Levine to this day funds the fireworks display at the Western North Carolina camp he attended as a child) and convinced him to meet with the Mountain States board.

“When he walked through the door,” remembers Barbara Allen a member of the board at the time, “there was a presence, an energy and a youthfulness, a sense of ‘I am ready to tackle this.’”

Bob Feathers, another board member, says, “We truly saw someone that could transform our health delivery system here.”

It didn’t take long to see just how true that statement would be. Levine’s first official day on the job as CEO at Mountain States was January 6, 2014. On January 9, Wellmont Health System announced it would seek a merger partner. It was apparent to most observers that if Wellmont sold to a large, out-of-market system, Mountain States would soon be forced to do the same.

At that point, says Dr. Linda Latimer, a board-certified anatomic and clinical pathologist and member of the ETSU Board of Trustees, “It would have been really easy for Alan to have bundled the Mountain States system up and given it away. He would have been successful in merger and acquisition and he could have moved on as a hero and hired at another great hospital system but instead he risked his career and reputation.”

Levine began sharing his vision of a merged system incorporating both local systems. One of the first businessmen to whom he spoke was Bank of Tennessee Chairman Bill Greene. The initial conversation between the two happened on a North Carolina golf course when Levine told Greene the merged entity would need approval from Tennessee and Virginia through a legal instrument called a COPA.

“I had no idea what that was,” Greene remembers.” He explained it to me and said ‘why don’t we talk about it and get



Terry, Laura, Katy and Alan Levine



Dr. Brian and Donna Noland, Alan and Laura Levine, Andy and Hayley Dietrich and Jennifer and Bob Feathers.

some people together and share some financials and share where both hospitals are and where they are both going? I said that was a capital idea. I begin to think that this makes sense.

“He looked at me straight in the eye on that mountain in that golf cart and said, ‘let’s make it happen,’” Greene says. “I knew he was our man.”

Initially, the Wellmont board resisted considering a Mountain States merger. But Levine stayed focused on the benefits to the region while the business community became increasingly engaged. An August 2014 public forum in Kingsport was a turning point. More than 3,000 people showed up to learn more about the logic behind keeping local control of the hospital systems. At the same time, Levine visited the offices of area business leaders, pitching them on the benefits of taking savings from eliminating unnecessary duplication and reinvesting those dollars in the regional economy.

“He had the ability to sit with the business leaders to help them understand that if we were able to eliminate some of this irrational competition and pull that money out and focus it in research and academics, partner and be able to draw down some of those dollars, the difference that it would make for the region,” Allen says.

On Feb. 1, 2018, more than four years after Wellmont started the ball rolling, the Ballard merger was finalized. Today, Levine has very clear ideas about how the merged company’s success should be measured.

“I think, number one, being able to demonstrate that we have got a sustainable financial model is really important. Two, I want to see us make progress with those population health measures. If we can improve third grade reading, if we can improve or reduce the rate of teenagers that are smoking and first time trying drugs, if we can reduce the run rate for obesity among children, if we do those three things alone, think about the impact that is going to have on the next generation.

“So, I really think if in five years we can look back and say all

right, we put the infrastructure in place and we got evidence-based initiatives in place, I will see that as a success. And then in ten years when we look back, we should see where we have improved against our peer counties. If we can see that trajectory change over time, I will say that we have succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.”

Entwined with his leadership of Ballard, Levine’s focus for the near future is supporting a burgeoning movement to revitalize regional economic development efforts. Along with a handful of other leaders, including most of the largest employers, Levine is working to create a better way of attracting jobs and investment to the region.

Greene, a longtime proponent of regional economic development, says, “The beautiful part of the heavy lifting that has started now is that the merger has become the hub. It has become the catalyst for the region to come together.”

Bringing together a regional economic development effort will not be an easy task. But then again, neither was creating Ballard. Possessing what Governor Bush’s father once referred to as, “the vision thing” can be as difficult as it is rewarding.

“Sometimes,” Levine says, “when you can see what is coming when others can’t and you have to make decisions to prepare for that, other people may not understand why you are making those decisions, and it is hard.”

But despite the difficulty, Levine’s message of inspiration to JA students could just as well be a message to the region. “Three words: make it happen. You have the capacity to learn. It’s a God-given gift, so make it happen. Learn as much as you can, take that knowledge, and don’t look to make excuses for why you can’t get ahead. Make it happen... when you make it happen, when you work hard to make things happen, you are not alone, part of what I mean by that is the Lord helps people that do help themselves. God doesn’t do for us. God gives us the capacity to go do, and that is the point I make.” ▲

## Now more than ever

By Mitch Walters, Chairman, Master of Ceremonies

It has been my pleasure to be involved with Junior Achievement the past few years and it has certainly been an honor and a privilege to serve as master of ceremonies for the 2018 JA Hall of Fame Gala.

Our region is blessed with wonderful examples of America's Free Enterprise System. Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee have both produced some great examples of people with high hopes and strong visions that truly changed the landscape of our area. The hard work of so many has helped transform our region of abundant natural resources in to an area that combines high tech and hard work and have allowed the Mountain Empire to compete in the global arena.

Alan Levine's bold leadership and innovation is no exception to the great leadership our region has to offer. He is charting a new course for healthcare in

our community and has been recognized nationally and also globally for his efforts.

During the evening of May 2, 2018, Junior Achievement paid tribute to Alan as we learned about his life, his education, his work ethic, his friends, his family and his business associates that helped mold him into the fantastic leader he is today.

The life that Alan has lived and the role model he has become make us all proud to be part of the honor he has received as the 2018 Laureate for the JA Business Hall of Fame.

Now more than ever, it is important to Junior Achievement of the Tri-Cities to allow students to see great examples of individuals like Alan Levine. His ethics, integrity and leadership skills are the traits that will help mold the youth of today into leaders in America's Free Enterprise System.

The youth of today are our leaders



of tomorrow and Junior Achievement certainly helps prepare them for success in the future. Thank you for doing your part Alan and Congratulations! ▲

## Where will the vision take us?

By Cathy Salley

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame honoring business leaders who have played a prominent role in our region and present themselves as positive role models for our youth. In everything Junior Achievement does, from raising funds to recruiting volunteers and implementing programs, we remain focused on our goal of impacting and empowering more young people in our region, teaching them real world lessons about financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and work readiness. Every step of the way, we must stress the relevance of education to their daily lives – emphasizing not just business, economics, and entrepreneurship but also citizenship, ethics, character, and life skills.

We are honored to have such an outstanding businessman as Alan Levine as our 2018 Laureate. Mr. Levine epitomizes the spirit of entrepreneurship and free enterprise that Junior Achievement strives to exemplify. Congratulations Alan!

Many thanks to our Hall of Fame sponsors, contributors, volunteers, educators, board members and staff. To the Hall of Fame committee, a special thank you for your time and energy in helping make this year another success. Thank you, Mitch



Cathy Salley, Sherry Tysinger, Carol Hicks

Walters, for the amazing job you did as chair of the event. Thank you to *The Business Journal* and to Spectrum Reach for their expertise and support in helping share Alan's life story.

With Alan's God-given talents, his strong faith, vision, creativity and leadership, plus other outstanding leaders and our remarkable people, we eagerly await what is in store for us and our beautiful region! ▲

# Hall of Fame Gala



Student Ambassadors Caroline Gilbert and William Karst Shannon Robshaw, Tony Keck, Paula and Chris Masters



Back row (L-R): Andy Dietrich, Alan Levine, Dr. Brian Noland. Front row (L-R): Hayley Dietrich, Laura Levine, Donna Noland.



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## The Award

The Business Hall of Fame honors business leaders who have played a prominent role in our region, all of whom have met these criteria:

**Ethics And Responsibility.** Each laureate must have established a successful business record based on ethical conduct and corporate responsibility to employees and to the community.

**Leadership.** Each honoree must have exerted a substantial influence on promoting and preserving our region's business climate.

**Recognition.** Each inductee must have positively contributed to the image of the Tri-Cities TN/VA region.

**Reputation.** Each laureate must have earned a high level of respect within the business community for financial achievement, corporate responsibility and public service.

*The Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame was established in 1994 to honor the champions of free enterprise and to present role models in business to youth.*





Back row (L-R): Louis Gump, Scott Niswonger, Rab Summers, Alan Levine, Mitch Walters, Steve Smith, Keith Wilson, Jim Powell, Dennis Phillips, Kent Bewley, Gregg Jones, Dan Mahoney. Front row (L-R): Bill Greene, Lewis Wexler, Jr., Dr. Jerry Miller, Lois Clarke

## Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame Past Laureates

### 1994

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

### 1995

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

### 1996

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

### 1997

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

### 1998

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

### 1999

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

### 2000

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

### 2001

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

### 2002

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

### 2003

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

### 2004

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

### 2005

Wayne G. Basler  
Steven C. Smith

### 2006

Jeff Byrd (1949-2010)  
Mitch Cox

### 2007

J. Don Hill (1929-2011)  
Jim Street

### 2008

Richard Green  
R.T. "Rab" Summers

### 2009

J. Brian Ferguson  
Joseph R. Gregory

### 2010

Jerry L. Miller, M.D.  
Keith Wilson

### 2011

Mike Quillen  
R. Lynn Shipley, Jr.

### 2012

Dennis R. Phillips  
James P. Rogers

### 2013

Allen Johnson  
Ken Maness

### 2014

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

### 2015

Roy L. Harmon, Jr.  
Mitch Walters

### 2016

Greg Boehling  
Lewis Wexler, Jr.

### 2017

Mark J. Costa  
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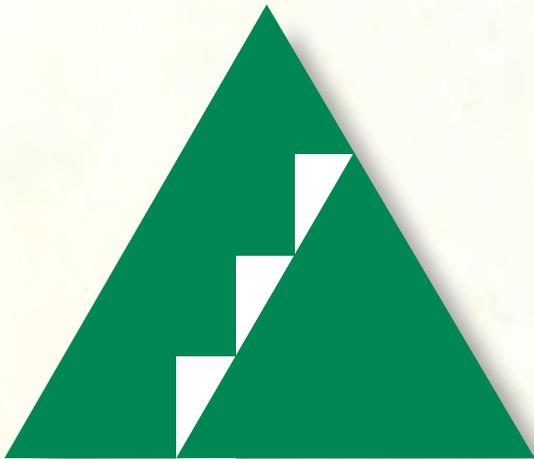
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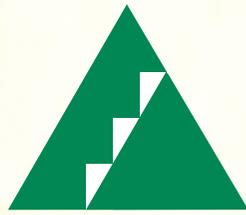
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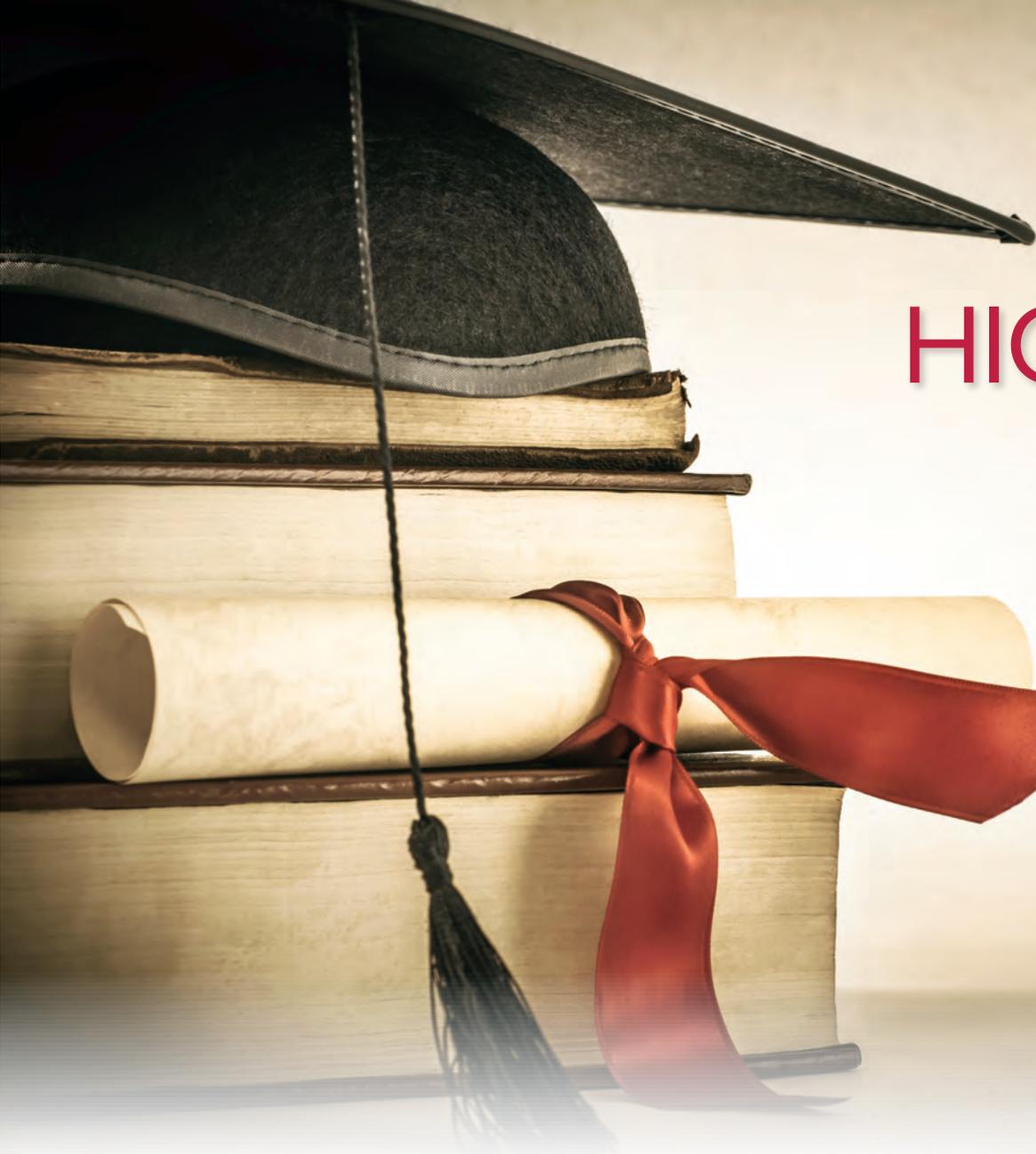
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# HIGHER D U C C A T I O N

**F**rom honors students working their way to upper management or medical careers to high school equivalency earners seeking to attain certifications in specific trades, the higher education student spectrum has broadened greatly over the last several years. Throughout Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, an array of community colleges, public and private four-year colleges and universities, and higher education centers with multiple tenants have consistently increased their offerings to help that range of students find pathways into successful careers here.

Student population demographics are changing as well. In Tennessee, where the state has instituted programs including Tennessee Reconnect and Tennessee Promise, individuals who once thought they had no shot at a college education are entering or returning to classrooms, bringing their own generation-diverse learning and communication styles with them.

Institutions of higher learning face greater challenges than ever before. Public institutions that once relied on state dollars are now working harder than ever to create public/private

partnerships. Grant dollars are fought for by more public and private institutions than ever.

Colleges and universities are working to reach out to the business community, seeking guidance on what training programs will be useful to members of the newly graduating workforce. The business community, for its part, is learning that the workforce is more diverse than ever before, with up to four generations working together. With increased numbers of non-traditional students and an economy at near-full employment, workers from any of those generations may be fresh out of school.

Where colleges once saw themselves as being in competition with each other, more now see themselves as being in competition with cultures of ignorance, unfulfilled promise, and economic decline. Thus, partnerships between institutions are becoming more common.

In the pages ahead, we'll touch on just a few of the many efforts being made by the region's higher education institutions to provide business with the individuals today who will drive our economy tomorrow.

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# East Tennessee State University creating multiple economic drivers

East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tenn., is the region's largest university. In addition to colleges of Arts & Sciences, Business & Technology and Education, the university has a wealth of healthcare-related courses of study. Colleges include the Quillen College of Medicine, the Gatton College of Pharmacy, the College of Clinical and Rehabilitative Health Services, the College of Nursing and the College of Public Health.

The healthcare sector's importance to the regional economy is almost impossible to overstate. In 2018, Ballad Health became the largest single employer in Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. As part of the merger that created Ballad, the company committed to investing heavily in research, potentially opening a wide array of economic opportunities based at East Tennessee State. In fact, it is the stated intent of Ballad Health to further leverage the College of Public Health at ETSU for its expertise in population health research, monitoring and evaluation of metrics, and securing research funding from external sources. Put in simpler terms, the investment by Ballad and later, potentially by other companies, into research at ETSU may portend opportunities not unlike those experienced by the Research Triangle of North Carolina years ago.

In addition, ETSU works in conjunction with Eastman to host the annual IDEAcademy, a multi-day seminar on innovation and leadership. The University also is home to the Roan Scholars, a competitive scholarship program targeted not to financial need, athletic talent or academic achievement; but to leadership potential.

## ETSU Rankings/Other Noteworthy Accomplishments

- U.S. News and World Report ranked the ETSU College of Nursing 28th in the nation among online graduate nursing degree programs offered by nursing schools all over the country. (Jan. 11, 2018)
- U.S. News and World Report designated ETSU's College of Nursing the best, and only, Tennessee school among its top online nursing graduate programs. The online graduate nursing program ranked 61st in the nation for best online master's in nursing degree programs. (May 24, 2017)
- The College of Nursing's master of science in nursing for nurse practitioner program has been ranked as the 20th most affordable such program in the country by the SR Education Group, a leading education publisher. (May 24, 2017)
- East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine has been ranked seventh in the nation for rural medicine training by U.S. News & World Report. (March 14, 2017)
- The Quillen College of Medicine at East Tennessee State University has been ranked 20th in the nation for producing medical doctors who go into family medicine. (December 21, 2016)
- University School ranked as 10th best high school in Tennessee.
- ETSU's doctoral program in educational administration is ranked among the top 20 online doctorate programs in educational leadership in the nation.
- The online B.S. degree program in human services at East Tennessee State University has been ranked seventh among the top 25 best online human services programs by the website *TheBestSchools.org*.
- Alumna Monique Richard was just named one of the top 10 nutritionists making a difference in the country by the publication, *Today's Dietitian*. Monique attended graduate school and did her internship here at ETSU.
- ETSU College of Public Health ranked 32nd in nation for Best Public Health Master's by *collegechoice.net*.
- Ranked No. 17 for Most Affordable Online Graduate Schools for a Master's Degree by College Choice.
- Digital Media among top 40 public animation schools and colleges 2018 (rank 31).
- Military Friendly school designation (Victory Media).
- Military Spouse Friendly School designation (Victory Media).
- Designated a Voter Friendly Campus, one of only 83 campuses across the country to earn this designation.
- Designated an Adult Friendly Institution. *Animation Career Review*
- The ETSU College of Public Health's "Project EARTH" curriculum was awarded the national Delta Omega Award for Innovative Public Health Curriculum.
- Legislation written by Devon Waldorff, a student at ETSU, to protect military personnel attending higher education institutions across the state was just signed into law by Governor Bill Haslam. **BJ**

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# Emory & Henry awards first class of doctoral degrees

It's not often that a college founded in 1836 does something for the first time. On May 5, however, Emory & Henry College did just that, graduating the inaugural class from the School of Health Sciences' Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) Program. Graduates from that program have already accepted positions serving the region at facilities in Bristol, Johnson City and Mountain City, Tenn.; Abingdon, Bland, Marion, Pulaski and Richlands, Va; and Bluefield, West Va.

The DPT program joined a growing list of healthcare-related degrees offered at the college. Since opening its School of Health Sciences in Marion, Va., the college has opened masters programs in Physician Assistant Studies, Occupational Therapy and Athletic Training.

The graduation culminated a busy academic year for the college, which officially completed a major addition to student life designed to assist in the transition students make to life after college.

Eight new residence halls in total, including six apartment-style halls, and a community center, have now been added to two existing residence halls in an area known as The Village. The design and layout of the facilities, which provides 197 beds, is a first for the college in its design and layout. Work on the \$12.5 million project began in the fall of 2016.

Students moved into the new halls this past August, while completion of the community center took place. In November, the college cut the ribbon on the community building that has been designed to accommodate 300 students and house laundry facili-

ties, a mailroom, a fitness center, a recreation area, a community kitchen and a collaborative meeting space. The community building also includes three various-sized classrooms and an apartment for the resident director.

Each apartment unit includes a shared living room and kitchen along with three bedrooms and two full bathrooms. The new structures incorporate design and finishes that closely match other buildings on the historic campus.

Funding for the project was made available in part through the USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program, which provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. Other updates in The Village include the updating of the exterior of the train depot that currently houses the college's athletics training. **BJ**



Dr. Lindsey King will join Smyth County Community Hospital

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## King University providing STEM outreach in local community

King University is a Presbyterian-affiliated, doctoral-level comprehensive university founded in 1867. The University offers more than 90 majors, minors, preprofessional degrees and concentrations in fields such as business, nursing, law, medical and health sciences, pharmacy, education, social work, and humanities.

King has broadened both its course offerings and its geographic footprint in recent years. The university has seven academic schools of learning, including Arts & Sciences; Behavioral & Health Sciences; Business & Economics; Communication, Information & Design; Education; and Nursing; as well as the Peeke School of Christian Mission.

For the 28th consecutive year, *U.S. News & World Report* this year recognized King among the best colleges in the nation. King was named a "Best Regional University." The Princeton Review named King one of the "Best Colleges in the Southeast" for a 14th consecutive year.

In addition to its main campus in Bristol, Tenn., King offers courses at locations in Kingsport, Knoxville and Sevierville, Tenn., and Abingdon and Richlands, Va.

This summer, King will also conduct outreach to young women

in the Bristol community. The King University Women in STEM club will host a camp for young women in grades five through nine. The STEMgineering camp at King will include activities focusing on Chemistry, Engineering, Biology, Cryptology (code breaking), Animation Software, Chess, Coding/Programming, Orienteering, and Statistical Analysis. The camp will be held from July 16-20.

"The outpouring of interest in our STEM Day for Girls event that took place this spring showed us there is a need and desire in our area for STEM-related education for young women," said Wendy Traynor, M.Ed., assistant professor of Mathematics at King. "We anticipated 20 students at our spring event and were incredibly pleased to host more than 70 middle school girls who were excited about STEM. Our new STEMgineering Camp at King was born from this enthusiasm."

The King University Women in STEM club is a group of female undergraduates majoring or minoring in Science, Technology, Engineering or Math. The club was formed in August 2015 thanks in part to a grant from the Tensor Foundation of the Mathematical Association of America. **BJ**

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## Milligan College moves “forward ever”

**M**illigan College is a Christian liberal arts college in Johnson City, Tenn., offering more than 100 majors, minors, pre-professional degrees and concentrations in a variety of fields, along with graduate and adult degree completion programs.

Milligan’s vision is to change lives and shape culture through a commitment to servant leadership. Milligan was ranked in 2017 by *U.S. News and World Report* as one of the top 25 regional universities in the South for quality and value, and one of *Washington Monthly’s* top master’s universities in the nation.

In 2017, the college announced the completion of the largest fundraising initiative in the college’s 150-year history, the second phase of the “Forward Ever” campaign, raising nearly \$42 million, bringing the decade-long campaign total to more than \$70 million. The funds have been put to good use. The college has added nearly a dozen new programs, including mechanical and electrical engineering and a doctorate in education.

Milligan’s new Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies program is a 28-month, 108-credit hour program filling a gap in healthcare employment regionally and nationally. The program prepares highly trained healthcare professionals with a foundation in primary care to work with physicians and other members of



PHOTO COURTESY MILLIGAN COLLEGE

the healthcare team in a variety of medical specialties. Classes are held at Milligan’s Ballard Physician Assistant Center on the college’s campus, with clinical partnerships throughout the region. Deadline for students to apply is Sept. 1. **BJ**

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## Northeast State students’ skills recognized

**N**ortheast State Community College’s SkillsUSA chapter, which was created a mere eight months ago, achieved outstanding success recently earning three gold medals, three silver medals, and one bronze medal at the Tennessee 2018 Leadership and Skills Conference.

“I am extremely proud of our students,” said Nichole Manz-Young, the college’s SkillsUSA advisor. “We only had a month to put together a team and prepare. The fact they did so well speaks to the quality of our students and programs—they just shined.”

The gold medalists have the opportunity to compete in the SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills competition set for June 25-29 in Louisville, Ky. More than 16,000 students, teachers, and business partners are expected to participate in that week-long event.

Additionally, Northeast State’s Austin Cox, president of the Tennessee SkillsUSA Postsecondary Association and president of the College’s SkillsUSA chapter, will compete for a national office at the conference.

The Northeast State Health Knowledge Bowl participants, Rachel Henson, Samantha Legg, Stephanie Roller, and Taylor Shockley defeated the reigning champions to take gold. In addition, Dominique Cross won gold for collision repair and Alexander Wittman took gold in computer programming. Other medalists included Austin Cox, who took a silver in job interviewing and Thomas Adams, who won silver in aviation.

Lance Parker took silver for automotive refinishing. Tristan Morley took bronze in electrical construction wiring.

Northeast State also garnered the James D. King Division II award for colleges. The award is named for King (Northeast State’s interim president) to honor his commitment to making SkillsUSA a priority experience for Tennessee College of Applied Technology students and his work to establish the Tennessee Postsecondary SkillsUSA Association.

The award is based on the most points accumulated by the school’s SkillsUSA chapter and the number and type of medals received at the state competition. In addition to the students, King earned the 2018 SkillsUSA College Postsecondary Leadership Award.

Northeast State’s participation in SkillsUSA is a sign of the college’s ongoing commitment to improving educational opportunities for students, King said. “SkillsUSA widens options for CTE students no matter what their field of study and showcases student skills and success in a unique way that gets them excited about higher education.”

The Framework components include personal skills, workplace skills and technical skills grounded in academics. Working in teams, understanding leadership and communicating clearly are required in any career. The Framework showcases these skills, connects students to employers, and provides a way for students to articulate what they are learning. **BJ**

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# Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center training teachers to train teachers

Sometimes, educators have to be educated before they can educate others. This summer, and possibly for the next three years, the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center (SWVaHEC) in Abingdon will be the site of just such education.

In 2016, Virginia became the first state in the nation to pass sweeping computer science education reform. The law mandates every Virginia child will receive access to essential computer science literacy – including coding – from kindergarten through high school graduation.

In order to comply with the new law, teachers throughout the K-12 spectrum will have to be trained to integrate those computer skills into the existing curriculum. The law is written so that different benchmarks must be met at different times between 2019 and 2022.

The SWVaHEC has signed a memorandum of understanding with Virginia to be a STEM Coach training site. “The teachers who come here to be trained will become STEM coaches at every building and every grade level,” says David Matlock, SWVaHEC

executive director. The first camp of teachers will undergo intensive training before returning to their schools as certified coaches for their grade level.

“We are partnering with CodeVA (a Richmond-based not-for-profit organization created to promote computer science) to provide free educator training to elementary school teachers from 46 schools in 17 districts.”

That means every school district will depend on its own teachers to train the rest of its own teachers. “Over the next three years we hope to train a whole lot of people from across the region,” Matlock says. “The first training sessions in the first week in June will involve elementary school teachers. My wife is a first grade teacher. She’s not a computer science person. But she will come dive head-first into this and come out as an elementary STEM Coach. She’s going to learn how to integrate it into her first grade curriculum to meet the state law, then she’ll go back to her school and coach the other first grade teachers and other elementary teachers if necessary.” **B**

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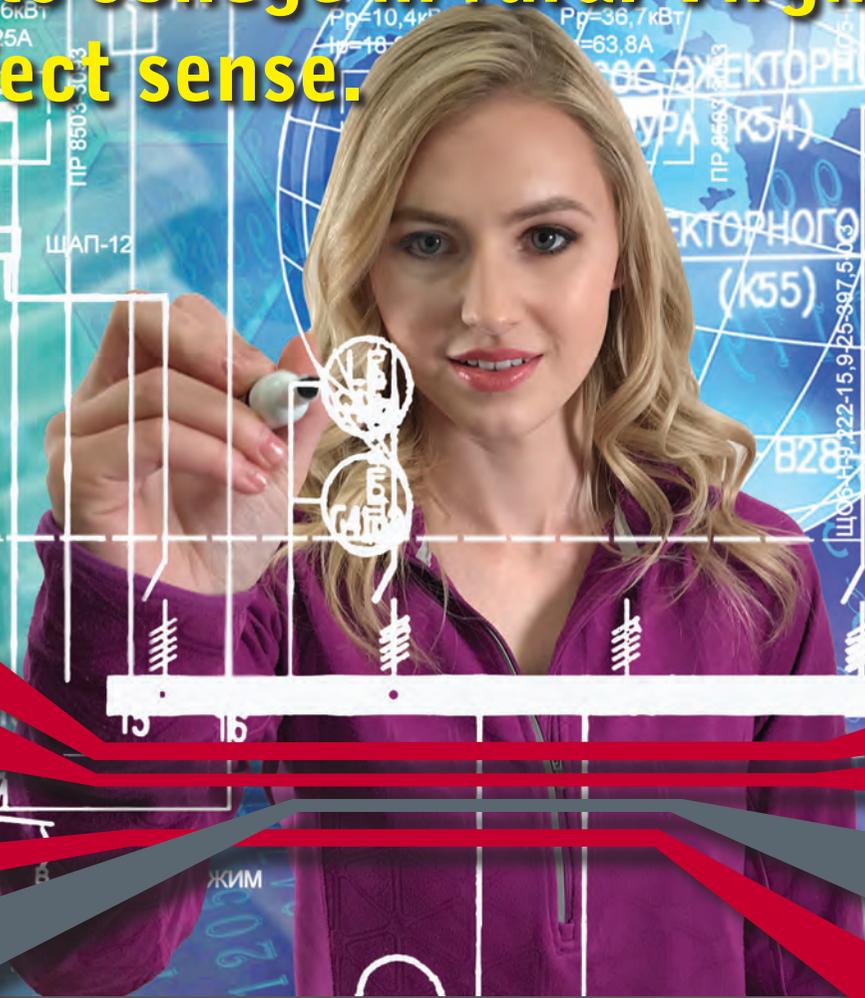


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# Tusculum University to enroll first optometry class in 2020

**T**usculum College just finished its final term. Tusculum University will begin offering classes in the fall. The university's administration cites several reasons for the change, but one stands out. Tusculum needed to become a university so it could open a new college.

"We have launched the College of Optometry," says Dr. James Hurley, Tusculum president. Currently there are only 22 colleges of optometry in the country, but Hurley says the papers have been filed and the launch process is underway. "We submitted our feasibility study successfully. We go before the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education Board in June."

Hurley says he expects the board to grant Stage One status to the college around 60 days after that. "At stage one, we start building out the facility and the faculty. Stage two is the point at which we start accepting students. It will take us a year to build the class, so we will have students on campus in Fall 2020." At that point, the college will be added to the Common App, in which all 22 schools appear. Students are allowed to apply to three of the colleges at any given time through the Common App.

Hurley is confident the college will meet all its deadlines. Much of that confidence is born of the fact that the executive vice



Dr. James Hurley and Dr. Andrew Buzzelli. PHOTO BY SCOTT ROBERTSON

president of the College of Health Sciences at Tusculum worked with Hurley to start one of the other existing optometry colleges. "Dr. Andrew Buzzelli and I started the program at Pikeville," Hurley says. "In their fourth year last year they were named the national optometry school of the year." **B**

## University of Tennessee MBA program offers diverse options

**T**he University of Tennessee Haslam College of Business MBA choices fit nicely into the school of "more is better." The college offers no fewer than seven different MBA programs, depending on the potential student's career path, geographic location and long-term goals.

The Haslam MBA is a residential full-time MBA program targeted to students who wish to learn a full range of technical skills in an applied learning environment. The Professional MBA is a weekend-based program for students who live within driving distance of the university's Knoxville campus. Both the Haslam and Professional MBAs take 16 months to earn.

Healthcare professionals have options specifically dedicated to their career path. The Physician Executive MBA program, the longest-running of its kind, is available only to physicians. The Healthcare Leadership MBA is an executive MBA program for those whose concentration is the business of healthcare, rather than direct provision of services. Both the Physician Executive and Healthcare Leadership MBAs are 11-month programs.

Other MBA programs include an Aerospace & Defense MBA

(11 months), a Strategic Leadership MBA for individuals who wish to transform their organizations (11 months) and a Global Supply Chain MBA program offered only to supply chain managers with organizations of significant scope and size (11 months). Clearly, if you are looking for a cookie-cutter MBA, Tennessee is not the school for you.

MBAs aside, if you are looking for a better understanding of workforce development, Tennessee is exactly the school for you. The UT Center for Industrial Services Institute for Public Service is offering a two-day course in August covering topics and trends such as the widening skills gap, the multigenerational workforce, the changing nature of the workplace and the importance of collaboration among allies.

The course is designed to help economic development practitioners, government officials and other community leaders at state, regional and local levels understand best practices, available resources and partnership approaches to building a competitive workforce. **B**

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# UVa-Wise drives economic progress in the coalfields

Perhaps no college or university in the region has done more to reshape its image in the last decade than the University of Virginia's College at Wise (UVa-Wise). What was in the past known as a small liberal arts school on the sleepy side of Southwest Virginia is now a dynamic force in the reconfiguration of the regional economy.

The campus annually hosts the Southwest Virginia Economic Forum (see page 14), an opportunity for education, business and economic development professionals to come together to ensure cooperation and innovation continue as the economy diversifies. The college's chemistry department recently received accreditation by the American Chemical Society, making the program the fourth academic program at the College to receive such recognition. ACS approval of the College's baccalaureate chemistry program means UVa-Wise offers a rigorous curriculum that produces students with the academic and professional skills necessary for successful careers in the industry.

UVa-Wise now touts accreditation in nursing, education, software engineering/computer science, and chemistry. "I am so pleased that the American Chemical Society has granted accreditation to the UVa-Wise chemistry program," said UVa-Wise Chancellor Donna Henry. "ACS accreditation reinforces the strength of our program and more clearly signals to gradu-

ate schools and employers that our students are well prepared for rigorous academic and professional careers in chemistry."

In addition, the college continues to develop new programs to push progress. July will mark the beginning of a new Entrepreneurship and Cybersecurity program on the campus. Targeted toward existing students in the fields of business and computer science, the program seeks to broaden the approaches in both disciplines. Students who currently study business will have opportunities to learn key concepts regarding the safe use of technology, while cybersecurity students will learn 101-level entrepreneurship skills. **BJ**



Chancellor Donna Henry



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The amount of Financial Aid available each year to provide grants & scholarships to students at VHCC.



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The Higher Education Center partners with public and private Colleges and Universities to provide degree programs, certificates, and professional development courses. The original five partners were University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, Old Dominion University, Radford University, and University of Virginia at Wise. The Center's partners have now grown to eleven including Virginia Commonwealth University, East Tennessee State University, King University, Bluefield College, Virginia Highlands Community College, and Emory and Henry College.

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

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## Virginia Highlands Community College takes nimble approach to workforce development

For more than 50 years, Virginia Highlands Community College has worked to provide pathways for the citizens of Southwest Virginia to find their places as productive members of the region's workforce. Those pathways may be as straightforward as attaining a two-year associates degree after graduating high school. They may take the student from VHCC to a four-year college or university to complete a bachelor's degree. They may also entail less traditional approaches. At VHCC's most recent graduation ceremony, a student who had been taking dual enrollment courses actually completed his VHCC degree requirements before he graduated from high school.

This summer VHCC plans to offer several short-term training courses targeted to students who don't need a degree to improve their potential to get higher-paying employment in the region. In July and August, the college will offer a program to help students obtain a commercial driver's license, for instance. Other such programs include programs for phlebotomy technicians and certified production technicians. Six Sigma Green and Yellow Belt courses will be offered. Students can even take short courses in mechatronics and drone operation.

The college works with local employers to create customized train-

ing programs and recently held a job fair to connect students and graduates with potential employers. VHCC also is home to the Virginia Highlands Small Business Development Center, which provides a wide array of technical assistance to small businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs.

The college offers local employers assessments to help make better educated decisions during the hiring process and to help identify training needs before they become turnover-causing performance issues. Among the assessments offered are the ACT Work Keys & The Virginia Career Readiness Certificate, Bennett Mechanical and DISC. **B**



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The College uses several approaches to learn the training needs of regional organizations. Advisory committees, comprised of members from the business community, meet regularly with faculty to discuss current issues and future trends in the field. The College uses the internationally recognized process DACUM (Developing A Curriculum) to develop and revise educational content. The DACUM process identifies the requirements that an employee needs to perform a job position by using a structured group process that gathers the expertise of the best employees in a field. The information is used to design or modify an educational curriculum to ensure the student learns the material required to be a strong entry level employee.



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## ON THE MOVE

### Administration

**Joshua McFall** has been named chief financial officer for Ballad Health's southwest market, which encompasses Johnson City Medical Center, Niswonger Children's Hospital, Franklin Woods Community Hospital, Woodridge Hospital and Overmountain Recovery. McFall comes to this role after a successful tenure as the chief financial officer at Franklin Woods and Woodridge, a position he held since 2014. There, he was responsible for overseeing finances and developing facility-specific initiatives that enhanced care and improved performance.

"Josh's background in local healthcare makes him a great fit for Johnson City Medical Center and our market, and we are excited to have him on board," said Stan Hickson, president of Ballad Health's southwest market. "We were grateful to have an excellent candidate for this job in-house, who was able to hit the ground running with a thorough understanding of Ballad Health's revenue and expenses."

McFall began his career with the health system as a financial analyst. He then progressed through roles of increasing responsibility in the corporate finance department before assuming leadership of financial operations at Franklin Woods and Woodridge.



Joshua McFall

### Banking & Finance

**Jenn Owen** has joined First Tennessee Bank as a senior vice president and commercial relationship manager in Johnson City. Owen has 10 years of experience in commercial lending and four years in major gift development. She holds a B.A. in Marketing and Communication from Marshall University. She is an RMA and OMEGA Performance Certified commercial loan officer, after completing an extensive commercial banking management development program on the campus of Wake Forest University.

Owen's community service is exemplary. She was named in the *Tri-Cities Business Journal* 40 Under Forty class of 2017 and is a graduate of Leadership Kingsport 2016. She is the chair of Sponsorship Committee for Crumley House Brain Injury Rehabilitation Center Polynesian Beach Party; chair of Munsey Preschool & Kindergarten Advisory Board; and vice chair of the Washington County United Way Campaign; member of Northeast State Foundation Board of Directors; member of Munsey Kids Ministry Team and member of Kingsport Chamber of Commerce Leadership Programs Council.

**Misti Race** has joined Appalachian Community Federal Credit Union as manager of ACFCU's Rogersville, Tenn., branch. Race spent the past six years in increasingly responsible roles at Educators Credit Union in Southeast Wisconsin, most recently serving as an assistant branch manager.



Jenn Owen

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“We are fortunate to welcome an experienced, energetic leader who understands credit unions’ importance to communities,” CEO Ron Scott said. “More importantly, Misti embraces ACFCU’s mission of walking alongside members as they grow in their financial knowledge and improve their financial wellness.”



Misti Race

Race, who holds a bachelor’s degree in finance from Ashford University, said she’s looking forward to serving Rogersville and the surrounding community with a full suite of financial products and services. “People trust the expertise of ACFCU’s team, and the credit union offers a lot of unique resources as a Community Development Financial Institution,” Race said. “I’m excited about contributing to that in a way that helps the community.”

## AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

### ETSU presents 2018 Alumni Awards

The East Tennessee State University National Alumni Association presented its 2018 Alumni Awards May 4. Pamela Prince-Eason, president and CEO of the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council was named Outstanding Alumna. Lt. General (Retired) Ronald V. Hite, former chairman and CEO of Cypress International



Pamela Prince-Eason



Ronald V. Hite



David W. Purkey



Melissa Steagall-Jones

was named Outstanding Alumnus.

Award of Honor recipients included David W. Purkey, commis-



Kevin Triplett



Joseph Trujilo



Sara Beth Brimer Davey

sioner of the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security; Melissa Steagall-Jones, partner, Blackburn, Childers and Steagall; and Kevin Triplett, commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Tourism.

Joseph Trujilo, owner of Johnson City Honda, was named Honorary Alumnus. Sara Beth Brimer Davey, a soprano with the a capella group The Swingles, was named Distinguished Alumna in the Arts. **BJ**

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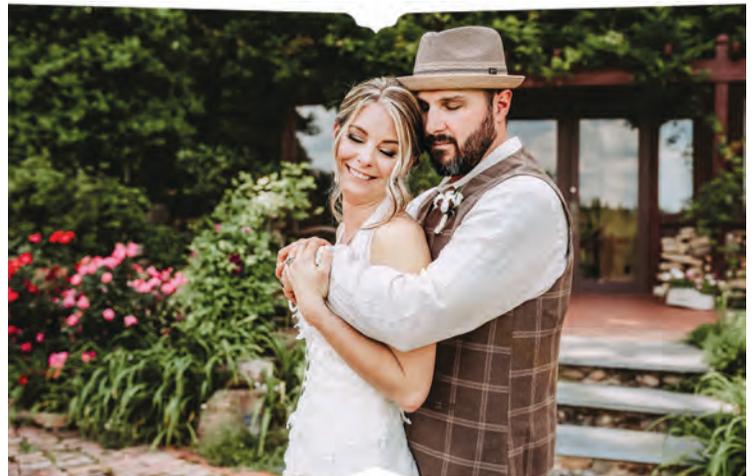
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\*Source: Dec. 2017 CVC Publication Audit Report.

# Tennessee small business report card:

Legislature gets good marks but should address discriminatory taxes

By Jim Brown

With the dust settled from a frenetic pace at the end of session, some are asking how did small business fare in the 110th Tennessee General Assembly? As state director of NFIB, Tennessee's leading small-business association, I'd say it fared quite well, with passage of several meaningful bipartisan reforms, and the defeat of one particularly harmful proposal.

More work, however, is necessary to end two discriminatory taxes that have created hardship for many entrepreneurs and an unlevel playing field. Our next governor and many new leaders will play a critical role in those discussions.



## The Good

The legislature passed several helpful bills that made NFIB's short list, including:

- Senate Bill 262 by Sen. Jack Johnson and Rep. Susan Lynn, which preempts local governments from establishing predictive scheduling laws on businesses.
- Senate Bill 1371 by Sen. Johnson and Rep. Kelly Keisling, which ensures consistent application of air permits, specifically that air pollution permit decisions are based on scientific air data and federal requirements, not local land use and zoning objections.
- House Bill 1143 by Sen. Ferrell Haile and Rep. Glen Casada, which clarifies inclusionary zoning language prohibiting local governments from below-market rental pricing, while preserving the use of voluntary incentives for affordable housing initiatives.
- House Bill 362 by Sen. Richard Briggs and Rep. Jason Zachary, which says post-construction stormwater permit requirements cannot be more stringent than current EPA requirements and requires state legislative review of NPDES permits regulating a local government entity's municipal separate stormwater system.
- Senate Bill 2465 by Sen. Roberts and Rep. Jeremy Faison, which provides protections and an appeals process for applicants with a criminal background to obtain a professional license, certificate, or registration.
- Senate Bill 1649 by Sen. Mark Norris and Rep. John Forgety, which improves liability framework for employers that employ students in work-based learning programs and establishes a pilot franchise and excise tax grant program.

## The Not-So-Good

The week before adjournment, a harmful provision added late to House Bill 2310 sailed through two House committees with almost no debate. The legislation, as amended, would have authorized the state to conduct third-party sales-and-use tax audits, putting confidential taxpayer information in the hands of private companies. The audits would have triggered prolonged back-and-forth's since third parties often don't leave until they find something to justify the cost of a visit or a computer-generated assessment.

NFIB objected for other reasons, including the lack of debate and suspicious fiscal impact statement of zero dollars. Hundreds of NFIB members contacted their representatives, asking how the state could contract with third parties without any cost. Lawmakers listened and removed the provision, saving that debate for a more transparent day.

## What's Next

There were other disappointments for small business, but reason for optimism tax reform is near. Senate Bill 364/House Bill 13 by Sen. Brian Kelsey and Rep. Jay Reedy would have eliminated the discriminatory professional privilege tax on 22 professions, as originally proposed, and 19 of 22, as amended. Both chambers decided against moving forward because of the fiscal impact of \$88 million and \$22 million, respectively.

The annual \$400 tax is particularly hard on start-up audiologists, landscape architects, podiatrists and speech pathologists. If nothing else, lawmakers should be alarmed Tennessee code states "engaging in any vocation, profession, business or occupation named in this part is declared to be a privilege taxable by the state alone."

The amusement tax on small fitness centers is also discriminatory and should be abolished. In 1986, big box fitness centers over 15,000 square feet obtained an exemption from the tax. Today, nearly 30 large entities don't collect it, while 600 small fitness studios must collect from their customers. The nearly 10 percent tax on good health has caused significant customer migration, slowed small business expansion, and created confusion in the industry, which has led to several six-figure assessments that could lead to closures.

This summer, thank your lawmakers for a job well done. Additionally, use your voice on the campaign trail and at area meetings. Ask all candidates to reform our tax code so small businesses can compete better in the years ahead.

*Jim Brown is the state director of NFIB. He can be reached at [jim.brown@NFIB.org](mailto:jim.brown@NFIB.org).*



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