

The Business Journal

of Tri-Cities Tennessee / Virginia

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Southwest Virginia moves ahead:

Three economic development initiatives announced in as many weeks

Plus
Building called
“key to downtown
Johnson City” sold
and
Eastman prepares
for centennial

Will Payne, project lead for InvestSWVA and managing partner of Coalfield Strategies, LLC

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| ON THE COVER

InvestSWVA kicks off new era of economic development

A new organization dedicated to marketing Southwest Virginia launches and quickly begins initiating projects



PHOTO COURTESY INVESTSWVA

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(L-R) TVC executive director Darrell Akins, Rep. Dr. Phil Roe and President Dr. Bill Greer addressed local leaders at Milligan College during a planning session for the 2020 TVC National Summit.

Milligan College to host 25th Tennessee Valley Corridor Summit

The Tennessee Valley Corridor (TVC), a Southeast Regional economic development organization, has selected Milligan College as the host for the TVC National Summit in May 2020. The

summit annually brings together companies and organizations that support the advancement of science and technology in a five-state region, including Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

The TVC aims to increase new federal investments and more private sector opportunities in the region, and its annual summit advances collaboration between key institutions, organizations, businesses and political leaders. “Last year, we found that federal investments into the Tennessee Valley Corridor exceed \$75 billion, and these investments lead to over 150,000 direct jobs for federal employees and contractors,” shared TVC executive director Darrell Akins. “These investments are spent on national security, America’s economic competitiveness and meeting the great challenges faced by our country.”

The summit rotates through locations in the five-state corridor region. Previous summits have been held in Johnson City and Kingsport. The Milligan-based summit is scheduled for May 2020.

Morrill Motors to cease operations in Unicoi County

Morrill Motors has announced its intent to close its Erwin, Tenn., manufacturing operation within the next 12 months. Roughly 120 employees will be put out of work. The company has filed the necessary paperwork with the Tennessee Department of Labor.

The Erwin plant, which manufactures small appliance motors, has been in continuous operation for 73 years, though the operation was sold to Regal Beloit in 2007. **B**

- 9:00am Took an order for 100,000 extra units.
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- 9:10am Stopped celebrating.
- 9:12am Started freaking out.
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On the arguments against regionalism



In the month or so since the Northeast Tennessee/Southwest Virginia Regional Economic Forum, I've talked with many people in the business, government and social sectors about regionalism and regional economic development. Their comments have generally fallen into one of three categories:

- "I'm on board and glad it's finally happening."
- "A regional approach to improving the economy is

better than what we've been doing, but I do have a problem with the way it's being approached right now."

- "I am against it, and I really don't see how that will ever change."

For the purposes of this column, let's just examine the statements of qualified support and the statements of opposition.

The arguments put forth by "never-regionals" so far have been, generally, specious. The most frequently used is, "(One of the forum panelists) doesn't even live in my city." This presupposes that loyalty to a place is determined by where one sleeps. In conversations I've had, this statement has been used as a lead-in to ad hominem attacks against the individuals who were on the stage at the forum, and then to expressions of fear that a rival city will come out of this better than the speaker's hometown. The fact that some of us would rather fight among ourselves than fight more effectively against other regions that are outcompeting us is an excellent indicator of why our regional economy has stagnated throughout the single longest period of economic growth in U.S. history.

Some Sullivan County-based government officials have indicated they believe the entire effort has been ginned up to help Johnson City become the dominant city in the region. This is either a lack of understanding or a willful pandering to voters who resent the Ballad Health trauma system decisions. The entire point of regional economic development is to allow the strengths of each community to be leveraged for the benefit of all. By doing so, a regional approach by definition all but precludes the creation of a "dominant" community.

Arguments from attendees who have indicated support, but with reservations, came directly as a response to the forum:

- "They called it Northeast Tennessee/Southwest Virginia, but there wasn't even a Virginia flag on the stage, much less any Virginia businesspeople."

- "There was just one woman, and she only read questions to a panel of white guys. There was only one person of color, and he was there to introduce a white guy."

- "There were more people over the age of 80 on that stage than under the age of 40."

- "The economist ignored Bristol and hammered Kingsport."

I can only pick the nits of one of these. It would probably surprise many of the folks angry about Dr. Jon Smith's economics presentation to know he chairs the Tri-Cities Airport Authority, a true regional body, with membership from the governments of both Bristols, Johnson City and Kingsport as well as Sullivan and Washington counties. I can tell you that Dr. Smith once declined to work up a study for *The Business Journal* that would have compared the retail performance of the cities in the region. He said he had concerns it would pit communities against each other.

Sadly, Dr. Smith did not spend enough time at the forum explaining that when he used the term "Johnson City", he was referring to the Johnson City metropolitan statistical area (MSA), and that when he said "Kingsport", he was referring to the Kingsport MSA, which includes Bristol. In retrospect, Dr. Smith might well have done better to combine the two MSAs and used a combined statistical area (CSA), to compare with the Ashevilles and Nashvilles of the world.

The rest of those meritorious arguments boil down to one common statement: "I didn't feel like the people on stage were representing me." In most cases, I believe that's a valid, fair critique. I also believe the time frame to start making this a more inclusive process is fairly short, and that it must be done in a very public way.

Will the people who put together the forum have to deal with wing-nuts and even more specious arguments if they do this? Undoubtedly. Will they have to compromise on some things they'd rather not? Perhaps, but if they're afraid opening up the process will force them to make sacrifices, then they should listen to the words of Mark Costa from the forum. Rather than risk getting 100 percent of nothing, as past regional economic efforts have done, "if we come together, I have no doubt, you know, we're all going to get a share of something really big and we're all going to be a hell a lot better off that way."

Amen.



PHOTOS BY EARL NEIKIRK

UVa-Wise Girls' Day in STEM

Camille Schrier, the reigning Miss Virginia 2019, told hundreds of sixth graders Sept. 21 at the University of Virginia - Wise that science is fun, relevant and easy to understand. As the featured speaker at the fourth annual Girls' Day in STEM, Schrier encouraged the youngsters to study hard for the many career choices they will have in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields. Schrier is a Virginia Tech graduate with degrees in biochemistry and systems biology. The event, sponsored by American Electric Power, allowed the middle school students to learn about health care, forensic science, environmental science and other topics.





PHOTOS BY EARL NEIKIRK



Workforce of Tomorrow

The United Way of Southwest Virginia IGNITE program continues connecting Southwest Virginia students to regional employers through the annual Careers Expo for Youth. The Expo took place on Sept. 24 and 25 at the Washington County Fairgrounds in Abingdon. During the two-day event, more than 4,720 seventh-grade students from across Southwest Virginia navigated through hands-on career activities, all led by more than 60 industry professionals from the region. Each employer had the unique opportunity to engage students through conversation and demonstration.



Passenger facility charges and the economic viability of your airport

by Gene Cossey, A.A.E, IAP, MPA

The Tri-Cities Airport is undoubtedly one of the most valuable assets of Northeast Tennessee and the surrounding communities in Virginia and North Carolina. The airport produces not only a substantial direct economic impact to our communities, but it also provides an immeasurable indirect impact both economically and socially. However, like other airports across the country, we fight a constant battle to build the infrastructure of a modern airport which meets the demands of growing air traffic, increased demand of larger and more sophisticated aircraft, and to provide the customer experience each and every one of our passengers expects from their local airport.



As a regional asset, the Tri-Cities Airport is your airport. It is one of the many assets of our region that provides you with the quality of life you have come to expect from Northeast Tennessee. You can travel anywhere in the world in just a matter of hours from your own airport and you have access to the businesses, jobs, entertainment, education, and talent that a region such as ours could not attract without having a viable commercial service airport. Currently, there are two ways you can support and grow this regional asset of yours. First, always make Flying Tri-Cities Airport your first choice whenever you are traveling. Second, support the current effort to increase the Federal limits imposed on Passenger Facility Charges by Congress.

Congress approved the Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) in 1990. Congress increased the PFC cap to \$4.50 in 2000 and has not adjusted the rate cap since that time. Under the PFC program, airports collect the PFC as a local fee and reserve the money for local use. PFCs supply a funding source to improve terminal facilities, update security, improve roadways and ground transportation, and to enhance competition among the airlines so that our community can have better and more affordable air service. With the inflation that has occurred between 2000 and 2019, the infrastructure cost necessary to improve our airport has effectively lowered the value of the PFC to only \$2.00 of current spending power. If

airports were able to adjust the PFC charge for inflation over the past two decades, we would currently be collecting \$8.50 per passenger that would go to building our airport.

To be clear, the Passenger Facility Charge is a fee which the airport charges the local airport passenger and that goes toward the improvement and upgrade of the local facility. The PFC is not a tax charged to everyone for the federal government to spread across the country. Unlike baggage fees and ticket change fees that go to the airlines, this fee helps give you a better airport, more air service choices, and provides enhancements to safety and security.

Here at Tri-Cities, just a modest \$4.00 increase in the PFC would allow us to expand the terminal checkpoint to provide an easier and faster time through security, it would allow us to add additional departure gates and jet bridges which will help attract more airline service, it will allow us to replace aging terminal HVAC systems and lighting systems, and it will allow us to match federal grants that improve runways and taxiways so that we can continue to attract new businesses to the airport and the region.

Airports do charge a PFC to each passenger for the first two stops of each one-way flight. It is true that you pay the PFC up to four times with each round trip you take. This does mean that a PFC increase of \$4.00 will potentially add another \$16 to each ticket. However, not increasing the ability of the airport to replace aging infrastructure, modernize facilities, improve security, and keep runways and taxiways in optimal condition will have a far greater economic cost to the entire region in the long run.

The Tri-Cities Airport Authority and I encourage you to contact your U.S. Congressmen and U.S. Senators and let them know how important this increase in Passenger Facility Charges are to those of you who Fly Tri-Cities and depend on your airport for the quality of life you enjoy. Let them know that you support raising the PFC limits and that you are asking them to help pass legislation that will do this.

The Tri-Cities Airport serves all the Tri-Cities Region with commercial air service from Delta Airlines, American Airlines, and Allegiant Air with direct connections to Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Orlando. Over 400,000 passengers a year fly to and from our great region through the Tri-Cities Airport and there is nowhere in the world that isn't just an easy flight away from your hometown airport.

Gene Cossey is executive director of Tri-Cities Airport.

Pending home sales increase, August closing rate slows

There were 919 new approved home sales contracts in August – 13 more than July – pushing the Northeast Tennessee Association of Realtors’ (NETAR) New Pending Home Sales index to the highest level since March 2017.

The active pending sales total rose to 1,437 – 147 more than July, according to Realtor Property Resource (RPR). New contracts are those approved in the reporting month while the active pending sales total includes all that have not closed.

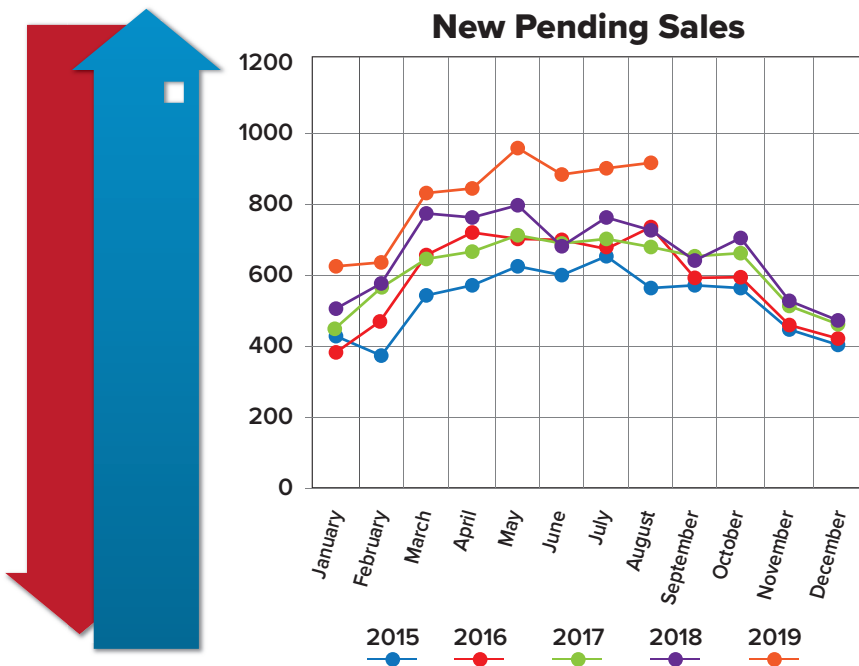
Pending sales are a leading indicator of housing activity based on signed contracts for existing single-family homes, condominium, and townhome resales. Since resales go under contract a month or two before the deal is closed, the index typically leads existing home sales by about two months. Under normal market conditions, it is not unusual to see up to 5 percent of contracts fall through. In today’s market, that fall-through rate is often higher due to contract contingencies.

Only 48 percent of the approved contracts in August moved to closing. That’s the lowest non-adjusted monthly closing

rate so far this year and leaves over 700 contracts – many with contingencies – awaiting closing. A National Association of Realtors (NAR) and NETAR survey focused on April to June conditions found 70 percent of contracts faced a contingency in making it to closing. The most common contract contingencies were as follows: home inspections (60 percent), obtaining financing (48 percent) and an acceptable appraisal (47 percent). The local situation has not improved since the study.

So far this year, new listings are 6.2 percent better than the first eight months of last year while new pending sales are up 17.9 percent. The region had 3.4 months of inventory in August. That’s the number of months it would take to exhaust active listings at August sales rate, said NETAR data analyst Don Fenley. It’s also the tightest inventory the region has seen since NETAR began reporting its monthly housing market report in 2008.

The median number of days of local listing was on market before closing in August was 73.



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(L to R) Troy Murphy, Delegate Terry Kilgore, Delegate Todd Pillion, Will Payne, Senator Ben Chafin, Delegate Israel O'Quinn, Todd Haymore

Invest SWVA launches, announces first project

Economic, marketing organization focuses on Southwest Virginia

by Scott Robertson

The Southwest Virginia Regional Marketing Initiative, officially known as InvestSWVA, launched Sept. 12 at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center. InvestSWVA is a public-private partnership focused on supporting local economic development and marketing efforts spanning the entire GO Virginia Region One footprint.

“InvestSWVA is a first-of-its-kind operation in the region and is committed to advancing big ideas,” said Will Payne, project lead for InvestSWVA and managing partner of Coalfield Strategies, LLC. “We are using a public-private model that harnesses the support of state and local leaders, economic development agencies and key corporate stakeholders to market the region, attract new business investment, and bring the jobs of the future to Southwest Virginia.”

InvestSWVA is a strategic economic development marketing operation driven by Coalfield Strategies, LLC in partnership with members of the General Assembly from the region.

“We selected Coalfield Strategies because of the team’s expertise in the technology and energy sectors, as well as their strategic approach and unique relationships in the region,” said Delegate

Terry Kilgore. “Together we will leverage business and state and local government relationships to develop viable business prospects to advance economic development in Southwest Virginia.”

InvestSWVA is complementary to efforts of state and regional economic development interests, and will work in tandem with Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP), GO Virginia Region One Council, Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA), Virginia’s Industrial Advancement Alliance (VIAA), the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (TRRC), and the local economic development offices in the region.

Seed funding for the initiative is coming from TRRC, with a private match from Point Broadband, LLC. Point Broadband, the former Sunset Digital. The funding is for two years, making the initiative aggressive, focused, and dependent on results. Payne said InvestSWVA will target four industry clusters featured in the GO Virginia Region One’s “Growth and Diversification Plan,” including: advanced manufacturing; agriculture and forestry, and food and beverage manufacturing; information and emerging technologies; and, energy and minerals, with

primary focuses on energy and “the future of work” in the region.

The InvestSWVA team includes: Payne; former Senator William Wampler serving as a senior advisor; Will Clear, who leads the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy’s economic development team, is serving as regional advisor; and, members of Hunton Andrews Kurth’s Global Economic Development, Commerce and Government Relations group including Todd Haymore, who served as both secretary of commerce and trade and secretary of agriculture and forestry.

The InvestSWVA team will work in collaboration with the Southwestern Virginia Technology Council (SWVTC), GO Virginia, the University of Virginia’s College at Wise (UVA-Wise), the Virginia Community College System and the region’s private higher education institutions to ensure a coordinated workforce development strategy.

The initiative is being led by: Senator Ben Chafin (R - Russell); Delegates Terry Kilgore (R - Scott), Israel O’Quinn (R - Bristol), and Todd Pillion (R - Abingdon); Evan Feinman, executive director of the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission; Joseph Puckett, general manager of Virginia and Tennessee markets for Point Broadband, LLC; and regional planning district commissions including: Duane Miller (executive director of LENOWISCO Planning District Commission), Jim Baldwin (executive director of Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission), and Aaron Sizemore (executive director of Mount Rogers Planning District Commission).

The GO Virginia Region One footprint includes the counties of Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Grayson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe; and the cities of Bristol, Galax and Norton.

InvestSWVA has partnered with the Northern Virginia Technology Council (NVTC), the trade association for the technology community in Northern Virginia which serves about 1,000 companies and organizations. The InvestSWVA team will partner with NVTC to market remote employment opportunities in Southwest Virginia to NVTC member companies.



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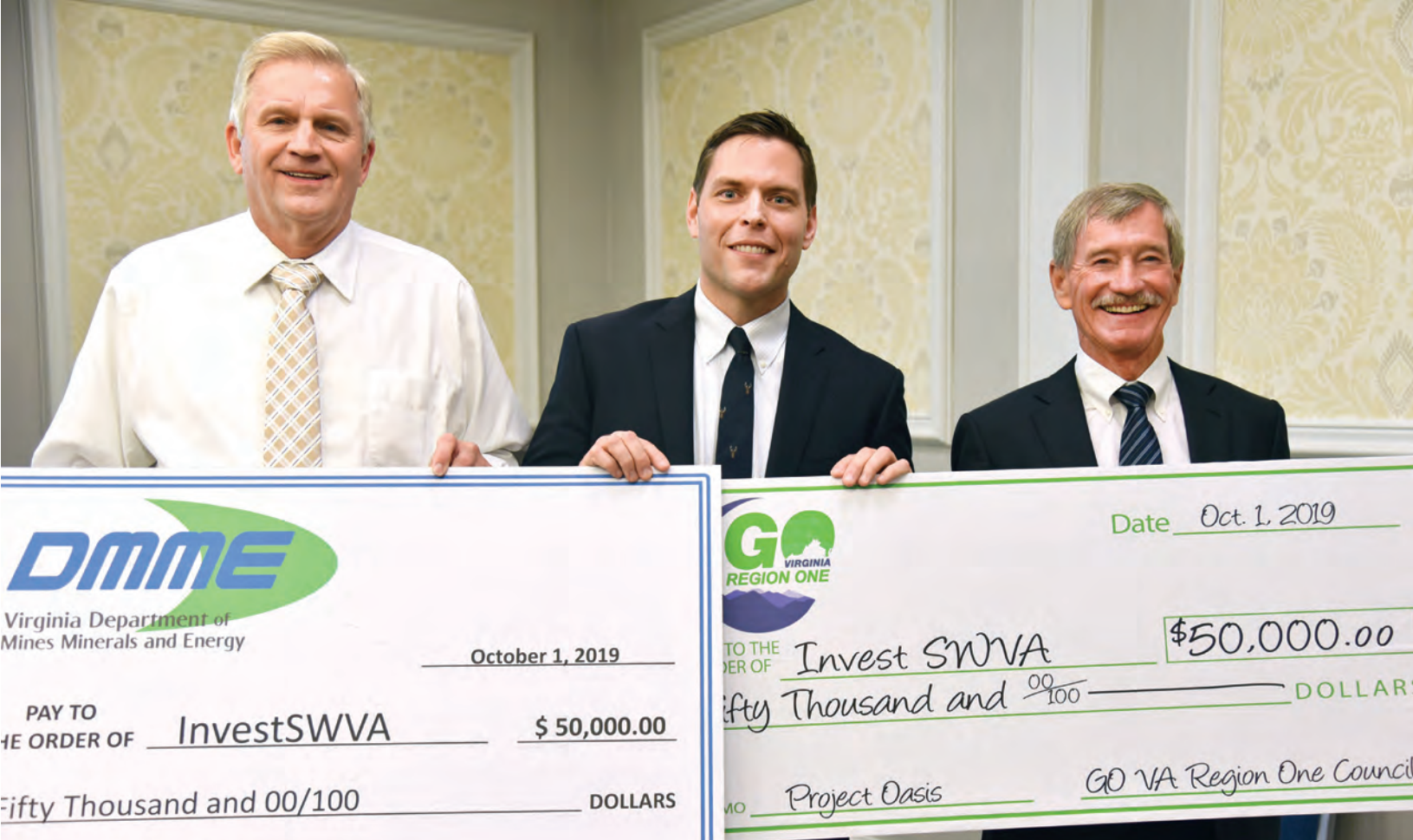
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DMME Deputy Director Butch Lambert, Will Payne and GO Virginia Region One Council Chairman Mike Quillen PHOTOS BY SCOTT ROBERTSON

INVEST SWVA, CONTINUED

“The strategic partnership between InvestSWVA and NVTC will open up a great deal of unique growth opportunities for our member companies, said Troy Murphy, director of policy for NVTC. “Through our collaboration, we hope to help bring high-tech employers to Southwest Virginia while attracting the next generation workforce to the region.”

The first project

InvestSWVA wasted no time announcing its first project. At a press conference/meeting with economic developers Oct. 1 at the Inn at Wise, Payne introduced Project Oasis, which seeks to identify and study data center opportunities across GO Virginia Region One, particularly on previously mined land.

The project is funded in part by a GO Virginia grant, matched by funds from the Virginia Department of Mines Minerals and Energy. The purpose of the project is to provide third-party validation for Region One to become the location of choice in the Commonwealth for data centers.

“Project Oasis is intended to be an example of how this region can work collectively and collaboratively to build a workforce geared toward hi-tech work,” Payne said. “Southwest Virginia can be a leader in data center development and our plan is to provide third-party validation and innovative opportunities for the tech industry.”

Project Oasis is looking at possible data center sites in all 16 localities within the Region One territory. The scope of work includes:

- **Site Selection (power/fiber):** The Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME), as the Commonwealth’s go-to expert on previously-mined property, will assist with identifying power and broadband availability to sites. These sites will then be vetted and evaluated, resulting in a list of viable sites for consideration.
- **Site Selection (water):** DMME will also assist with identifying water availability in mine pools beneath sites being vetted, with the idea that the cold water in these mine pools could be used to help cool data centers.
- **Engineering Feasibility and Design:** The project will study the feasibility of using mine pool water circulation to augment data center cooling. This includes providing a preliminary design of the HVAC cooling system at a site, assuming it is feasible.
- **Mine Stability Analysis:** Project Oasis will undertake an analysis to calculate the stress water circulation would have on mine stability.
- **Market Analysis:** Project Oasis will conduct a study into the market and appetite for data centers in Southwest Virginia, barriers to locating in the region, and the site characteristics required to secure a data center project.

The DMME funding will be used to research the possibility of using water in underground mines that are no longer operating to cool a potential data center through a geothermal closed loop system. “The real key is economics when we look at what it’s going to cost to run the pumps and circulate the water for a facility relative to the savings,” said Will Clear, DMME director of Finance and Procurement. “Our back-of-the-envelope calculations say that should be anywhere from \$200,000 - \$300,000 per year.” ⁸¹

JCDA buys John Sevier Hotel

by Scott Robertson

The John Sevier Hotel building, the largest edifice in downtown Johnson City, is now the property of the Johnson City Development Authority. The JCDA, which closed on the property last week, plans to keep the current property manager, M&M Properties, in place while hiring a developer to build new units for the current residents. The former hotel building is currently a subsidized housing apartment complex.

“We want to make sure that the building is clean and safe,” says Diana Cantler, director of downtown development for the JCDA. Much of the building’s interior is in a state of disrepair, and a significant amount of work is expected to be required. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development is due within 90 days to inspect the building. “We will do everything that HUD says we need to take care of.”

The JCDA plans to upgrade the current housing units in the short term, then provide alternative housing for the tenants and redevelop the entire building. Since the JCDA plans to relocate the current occupants of the building within the next couple of years, Cantler says, the authority does not plan to pay to have non-mandated work done that would run contrary to the planned end use of the facility. “We won’t spend an exorbitant

amount of money repairing things in the building that are not necessary for the long term.

“We anticipate it’s going to be multi-use building, with the first floor retail,” Cantler says. “I would assume the lobby will be on the second floor, as it was originally. I anticipate a restaurant on the top floor where the ballroom was. And then in the middle it could be apartments. It could be condos. It could be office space. It just depends on what the market is in two to three years time.”

JCDA officials met with occupants of the building within days of the sale, listening to concerns and explaining plans for alternative housing development over the next couple of years. In order for the project to move forward, the current occupants must move to off-site housing which has yet to be built. Cantler says the JCDA is asking developers for proposals for locations and plans in that regard.

“The JCDA is not going to tell the developer where they have to build,” Cantler says. “That’s not our responsibility.”

“My gut is it’s going to be two years to get that new housing built. I could be wrong. Somebody could come in and already have property and say, ‘we can do it in 18 months,’ but I think 24 months seems like a good projection – 24 to 28 months.”

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Southwest Virginia Energy Research and Development Authority Begins Work

Region once dominated by coal now taking an “all of the above” approach

Senator Ben Chafin and Delegate Terry Kilgore announced Oct. 3 that the Southwest Virginia Energy Research and Development Authority has begun its work. The authority was established through legislation patroned by Chafin and Kilgore that passed during the 2019 General Assembly session.

“Southwest Virginia is a prime location for energy research and development activities that leverage our region’s talent and natural resources,” said Chafin. “Our legislative delegation is committed to seeing the region build on its long history of energy generation in order to grow our economy.”

The Authority’s purpose is to promote opportunities for energy development in Southwest Virginia, create jobs and economic activity in the region consistent with the Virginia Energy Plan, and position Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth as a leader in energy workforce and energy technology research and development.

“The Authority allows us to connect research and economic development in order to drive energy innovation in Southwest Virginia,” said Kilgore. “We should take an all-the-above approach to keep Southwest Virginia as the energy capital of the East Coast.”

The Authority met for its inaugural meeting Sept. 30 and elected Mike Quillen as chair and Dr. Kris Westover as vice chair. Quillen currently serves as chairman of the GO Virginia Region One Council, and Westover is president of Mountain Empire Community College.

“This Authority is going to think outside the box on energy projects that bring together innovative research, workforce development and economic development under one umbrella,” said Quillen. “Our team is going to think creatively and strategically on how to pair renewable energy generation with job-creating projects.”

“The Authority’s focus on energy workforce development will help drive economic development opportunities,” said Westover. “Partnering with K-12 and higher education interests in the development of the Southwest Virginia Energy Park will be a game-changer for our region.”

Chafin and Kilgore said they had the following goals in mind when drafting the legislation creating the Authority:



Chair Mike Quillen
PHOTOS COURTESY
SWVAERDA



Vice chair Dr.
Kris Westover

“Our team is going to think creatively and strategically on how to pair renewable energy generation with job-creating projects.”

– Mike Quillen, former coal executive, now chair of the Southwest Virginia Energy Research and Development Authority

- Leverage the strength in energy research and workforce development of Virginia’s public and private institutions of higher education;
- Support the development of pump storage hydropower in Southwest Virginia and energy storage generally;
- Promote the development of renewable energy generation facilities on brownfield sites, including abandoned mine sites;
- Promote energy workforce development;
- Assist energy technology research and development by promoting the development of a Southwest Virginia Energy Park; and
- Identify and work with the Commonwealth’s industries and nonprofit partners in advancing efforts related to energy development in Southwest Virginia.

The Authority’s board is made up of 11 members: four members appointed by the Governor, four members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates, and three members appointed by the

Senate Committee on Rules.

The governor announced the following board appointments: Dr. Michael Karmis of Blacksburg, Professor and Director, Virginia Center for Coal and Energy Research, Virginia Tech; Brad Kreps of Abingdon, Clinch Valley Program Director, The Nature Conservancy; Lydia Sinemus of Bristol, Corporate Director, Human Resources and Environmental Health and Safety, Strongwell Corporation; and, Dr. Kristen Westover of Dryden, President, Mountain Empire Community College.

The Senate appointments include: Steve Breeding of Lebanon, Vice Chairman, Russell County Board of Supervisors; Travis Hackworth of Cedar Bluff, Chairman, Tazewell County Board of Supervisors; and, Dr. Marcy Hernick of Abingdon, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs and Assessment, Appalachian College of Pharmacy.

The House of Delegates appointed: Jason Eige of Bristol, Vice President and General Counsel, The United Company; Duane Miller of Duffield, Executive Director, LENOWISCO Planning District Commission; Dan Poteet of Chester; and, Mike Quillen of Bristol. [BJ](#)



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Proposed “primary economic development organization” plan for Northeast Tennessee made public

by Scott Robertson

A document published online as part of the agenda for the Sept. 24 Bristol, Tenn., city council work session includes details of an effort to create a single entity “to serve as the primary economic development organization (EDO) for the eight counties recognized by the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development as its Northeast Tennessee Region.”

The NETs

The document, a draft of a white paper authored by NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership CEO Clay Walker in collaboration with Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership (NeTREP) CEO Mitch Miller, includes 25 pages of details, plus a resolution ready for consideration by local governments. The plan, entitled, “The Right Time for the Right Organization” contemplates possibilities including the unification of NETWORKS and NeTREP.

Existence of the plan was first confirmed by NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership Chairman Bill Sumner in the September issue of *The Business Journal*. The Bristol City Council work session packet marked its first public release. Walker was on the agenda for the Sept. 24 work session to discuss regionalism and economic development. However, both he and Miller (who learned of the document’s publication when called by *The Business Journal*) appeared surprised Bristol had made the document public. While the draft is dated June 26, 2019, its origins go back to the NETWORKS strategic planning retreat in June 2018, Walker told *The Business Journal*.

“We formed a committee to examine regionalism,” Walker said. “Whether we needed to step it up in this area – which I think everyone figured we did – how would a regional plan look, how would we be able to restructure and collaborate with NeTREP, if, in fact, a restructure would be necessary – just taking an assessment of how we were doing things and how could rethinking our procedures and interactions with other EDOs benefit us all.

“I worked on this paper for a few months, discussing it with my organization’s leadership along the way, before sharing it with Mitch towards the end of last year,” Walker said. “I wanted to get his input, especially if I had fundamentally misrepresented NeTREP in any way or suggested something that he was adamantly against.

“Mitch, as I expected he would, made some very helpful edits and, if memory serves, we implemented every one of his suggestions into the paper. We then went a little deeper with the potential for a merger or at least the sharing or division of duties among our organizations and even mocked up some working organizational charts.”

Both Walker and Miller said despite the inclusion of a model resolution for local governments, the plan is far from complete.



To read the draft in its entirety, visit the Board Docs section of the Bristol, Tennessee website.

“I would call this a great start,” Miller said. “It basically got us to the point where our officers were able to come together. Clay and I have had conversations and a lot of other discussions have transpired as a result of putting that together.”

Walker called the plan a jumping off point for a broader discussion of regional economic development. “We’re not married to anything in here other than the main point that to

be competitive, we have to find a way for better collaboration.”

A true regional economic development plan, Miller said, will eventually include items not addressed in the just-published draft. “I think it has helped us think beyond just what’s written in that report, to think bigger, to have more than traditional economic development, but to think about tourism, workforce development and other items.”

The Sept. 10 Northeast Tennessee/Southwest Virginia Regional Economic Forum did not play a role in the formation of the white paper, Walker said, noting that the draft had been in the works for months. However, he said, he hopes the organizers of that event, who have advocated for an “umbrella organization” to handle economic development in the region, will see this as an opportunity to move forward together. “We’re open – in fact, we encourage – other stakeholders who are advocating for a true regional approach to economic development to dissect this plan, deconstruct it, beat it up, and help us get to the optimal course of action. Heck, we don’t even agree with everything in this document among ourselves.

“We believe that changing, adding, deleting and coming up with the final version of how we go forward as a region should be, must be a team project,” Walker said. “Not only would an attempt to dictate the terms without collaboration doom this or any plan to failure, but it would fly in the face of the ideals of regionalism itself.”

What does it propose?

The key proposals are included in a section entitled, “So...Here’s the Plan.” It reads as follows.

“NETWORKS Economic Partnership would be formed as a Public-Private partnership, absorbing either only NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership’s staff or both NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership’s and NeTREP’s staffs depending on the final determination of the structure. This organization would serve as the primary economic development organization (EDO) for the eight counties recognized by the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development as its Northeast Tennessee Region. (In the event that we do remain separate organizations, we hold that both groups should ideally represent the same eight county region).

“We believe that defining our region to coincide with TNECD will provide consis-

tency and cohesion with our most significant partner and lead provider and promote a more coordinated, user-friendly working relationship for NETWORKS, TNECD, TVA and site selection consulting firms.

“NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership (Sullivan Partnership) will remain intact, with significantly revised bylaws, but with the same basic structure that currently exists in regards to Board of Directors representation, property ownership and management, debt service and operational contributions. However, a line item will be designated as “NETWORKS Economic Partnership” that will replace all items under Salary and Benefits and Marketing in its current budget.

Other administrative line items will be lessened and/or transferred to the NETWORKS Economic Partnership contribution.”

Will this float?

The question of whether others will see the white paper as a starting point or a non-starter remains to be answered. The Mayors’ Joint Blue-Ribbon Task Force, comprised of five workgroups convened by Sullivan County Mayor Richard Venable and Washington County Mayor Joe Grandy is expected to release its initial recommendations Nov. 13. Those recommendations have been mentioned as another possible starting point. **B**



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Costa: Innovation still driving Eastman's success

by Jeff Keeling

A century ago, Northeast Tennessee's abundant timber resources and the methanol supply they could produce inspired George Eastman to establish what became Eastman Chemical Company. With Eastman entering its second century and the world seeking sustainable economic models, methanol is coming full circle thanks to Eastman's constant focus on innovation, CEO Mark Costa said.

That innovation will help keep Eastman competitive through economic cycles, Costa added during a September 25 "count-down to centennial" event at the Toy F. Reid employee center. It will also help Eastman remain a primary driver in the region's economy, and it could propel the company to a leadership role in advancing the "circular economy," Costa told reporters.

"We see a huge opportunity right now in providing chemical recycling that allows us to take polyester and other plastics, and textiles in carpets, and recycle that carbon back into our new products," Costa said.

Eastman uses two processes to transform waste plastics back to their original molecular states. One is chemical and is on the verge of scaling up. The other, which Eastman hopes to deploy at scale by 2021 or 2022, uses a process called methanolysis to "unzip" waste products back to their basic carbon or ingredients, Costa said, and make a new product without extracting virgin resources.

"That's a huge opportunity for us with the sensitivity today in the world about addressing plastics in the ocean, landfill problems, and we're going to be at operational scale well ahead of anyone else in the Western world in solving this problem, so I'm really excited about that," Costa said.

The new technology, along with other product innovations, lets Eastman continue to invest in Kingsport, where it employs about 7,000 full time and 4,000 contract workers and by Costa's reckoning creates about seven additional small business jobs for each Eastman job. "We drive growth not just for ourselves but for the entire community, and we take that responsibility very seriously."

Costa said Kingsport, which he called Eastman's "biggest asset," will benefit from investment in new technologies and drive their development. "A lot of this chemical recycling technology will likely happen here, and this is a way to keep on evolving the role that this town plays in making the world a better place."

Costa said other innovative products also leave Eastman able to navigate the inevitable end of a long economic expansion. The key, he said, is "creating your own growth." He ticked off a list of arrows in that proverbial quiver, including organic acids that replace the need for antibiotics in animal feed, additives that make tires more economical and fuel efficient and world leadership in production of non-phthalate plasticizers.

"The best thing we can do is innovate where we grow products like paint protection film for cars at double digit rates in a declining auto market, where we bring life back to a lot of products

because of recycled content and grow and replace other peoples' materials who don't have that option... Innovation is how you defend yourself (and) it's also how you create your own growth."

Costa said Eastman's competitiveness, innovation and focus on sustainability make him proud to be leading the company into its second century.

"We're leaning in and making the world a better place from a health and wellness point of view, a natural resource efficiency point of view and a productivity point of view. That's the heart of who we are." ■



Scott Ballard speaks with Mark Costa during the Eastman 100 kickoff.
PHOTO BY JEFF KEELING

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Terri Gillespie, Hannah Burnette, Jules Lemmon, Renae Anderson, Tim Felts, Connor Manuel and Sarah Graham represented the interns and mentors in the 2019 Ignite class. PHOTOS BY EARL NEIKIRK

United Way of Southwest Virginia connecting schools, manufacturers

Interns, mentors highlight annual Leaders Breakfast

by Scott Robertson

For more than three years, the United Way of Southwest Virginia’s Ignite program has been a vehicle to bring the worlds of education and employment closer together. In a time when employers have faced population decline and a shrinking workforce, educators have been facing the struggles of meeting the needs of businesses in their shrinking communities while still giving students an education that would meet or exceed Virginia’s standards of learning. Neither side had time to talk at length with the other.

The problem was brought into sharp focus in a credential study supported by GO Virginia, the Virginia Growth and Opportunity Fund. The mission of the study was to help inform decisions made by Southwest Virginia school districts that offer credentials for students to earn during high school. More than 100 employers completed a survey in which they identified what entry-level credentials they required or were likely to re-



Steve Smith, president and CEO of Food City and Travis Staton, United Way of Southwest Virginia CEO

quire in the next five years. At the same time, high schools supplied lists of all credentials offered in their schools.

At the 39 high schools surveyed, 310 different credentials were offered in 2018. But of all credentials offered, 44 percent offered by at least one school were not required by any of the 100+ employers. Further, there were 69 credentials required by at least one employer that were not offered in any school.

The Ignite program has been growing as it has begun to bridge that gap. From humble beginnings in which the Ignite program was piloted at three different schools in three different systems, it has grown to affect 28,981 students in 94 schools across 19 school systems.

Steve Smith, president and CEO of Food City and a member of the GO Virginia state board, said that when Ignite came before the board, it practically sold itself to business leaders from



The 2019 United Way of Southwest Virginia Leaders Breakfast was held Sept. 25 at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center.

“They supplemented our workforce, and they helped us understand what it is this next generation is going to need and what they are looking for.”
 – Renae Anderson, Universal Fibers

across the Commonwealth. “The Ignite program is now being used as a model for the rest of the state to follow,” Smith said.

United Way created the Ignite program to help supply local employers with a talent pipeline of next-generation skilled workers, thus helping to build a robust competitive economy in Southwest Virginia. A key part of this effort is preparing youth to be successful in the workplace by giving them opportunities to develop their skills and competencies through real-life work experiences. By connecting students with internships, the United Way and its partner businesses helped students gain critical workplace skills through hands-on learning.

Each intern applied for the job opportunity developed by the company, completed an application screening process, an interview process, and finally the hiring process. United Way of Southwest Virginia provided a week of skills training focused



Steve Smith, president and CEO of Food City

SEE IGNITE, 24



Terri Gillespie and Hannah Burnette

IGNITE, CONTINUED

on communication, soft skills, and workplace expectations before the students went to the workplace. Those weeklong pre-workplace training sessions were administered by the United Way, but were developed in conjunction with the companies that would take part in the program.

In the summer of 2019, employers made 93 internship positions available, and ultimately, 36 interns completed a summer internship program at 18 different employers. All 18 companies indicated they would re-up for 2020.

Students from the inaugural group of Ignite interns spoke during the Sept. 25 United Way of Southwest Virginia Operation Tomorrow's Workforce Leaders' Breakfast about their experiences over their four-week Ignite 2019 Summer Internships. Speakers included intern and mentor matches from Universal Fibers, Mitsubishi Chemical Advanced Materials, Rooftop of Virginia, and LENOWISCO Planning District Commission.

In their own words

Jules Lemmon, a senior at John S. Battle High School, saw the opportunity posted for an internship in spring 2019 and decided it had a lot more potential than taking a job at a fast food restaurant for the summer. She ended up working under the mentorship of Renae Anderson at Universal Fibers in Bristol. "Overall it was an amazing experience because I learned about 3D printing and I learned about environmental sustainability and how I really want to go into that. I learned soft skills too, like communication in an office."

Anderson, in turn, praised Lemmon. "She was flexible. She was creative. She brought a fresh mindset to the table. That was beneficial to Universal Fibers. That's important to all businesses."

Part of the allure for both the students and the companies was that the internships were not set up to be just bringing in kids to make copies or make coffee. The pay ranged from \$8.50 an hour to \$12.50, and the work had to be beneficial to the students' ability to be better employees in the future, while benefitting the employer at the same time.

"The interns did real projects," Anderson said. "They weren't just tasks. They supplemented our workforce, and they helped us understand what it is this next generation is going to need and what they are looking for. So by putting in that commitment and that time, we really got a lot out of it."

Hannah Burnette hired on with Rooftop of Virginia in Galax, where she was paired with mentor Terri Gillespie. "Hannah came in for her first ever job interview," Gillespie said. "She was almost vibrating out of her seat she was so nervous. She came in very fresh, and I think she left with some skills like leadership. Her communication skills were great and she gained confidence. She learned how to take initiative and develop her own tasks."

Connor Manuel interned at Mitsubishi Chemical Advanced Materials under mentor Heidi Shupe. "Everybody there was very supportive," Manuel said. "They all understood it was my first real job. It was cool being in a big plant. I've never met another kid that has had the experience I had." Manuel was tasked with helping prepare the company for an OSHA Star Site audit. "It basically rewards companies for being above and beyond with safety in the workplace."

"Connor was a key part of the team," said Tim Felts, who sat in for Shupe at the Leaders Breakfast. "He wasn't just somebody to find a place for and give odd jobs to. He was critical." Duane Miller, executive director of LENOWISCO Planning District Commission said, "More businesses and organizations should utilize the Ignite internship program. You never know when you might find a future employee that will strengthen your company." Miller served as an Ignite mentor for Sarah Graham of Lee High School. "We are eager to participate in United Way of Southwest Virginia's Ignite internship program again next year," he said.

Said Graham, "So few people my age get the opportunity to experience filling out a job application, getting to have a real job interview, and getting to see what goes on in 'the real world' before they graduate. More opportunities should be available to students who may benefit from exposure from companies like LENOWISCO PDC and United Way of Southwest Virginia."

Travis Staton, United Way of Southwest Virginia president and CEO said, "We are hopeful that these internships will enhance the relationships between educators, employers, and students within the region, creating a sustainable solution to the challenges facing the workforce of tomorrow."

"We have proven we can deliver results," Staton said before inviting more businesses to take part in the program in 2020. **B**

Darling relays lessons learned on 9/11 during Be BOLD event

by Dave Ongie

As Milligan College President Dr. Bill Greer welcomed attendees of the Bank of Tennessee's annual Be BOLD event to his campus on Sept. 12, he offered his reflections on leadership.

"I can think of no better kind of leadership than servant leadership," Greer said.

The business leaders who attended the half-day event had the opportunity to hear from a speaker who epitomized servant leadership throughout his extensive military career. Retired Marine Lt. Col. Robert J. Darling recounted his experiences inside the bunker under the White House on Sept. 11, 2001, relaying the lessons he learned about decision-making and crisis management, which have plenty of practical applications in the business world.

"What is interesting is the crisis decisions they had to make," said Bill Greene, chairman, president and CEO of BancTenn Corp. "Can you imagine having to make a decision, with a hijacked plane coming toward you with people on it?"

Of all the crucial decisions made on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, the decisions made regarding United Flight 93 stood out for many reasons. By the time Flight 93 was identified as a threat to Washington D.C., both of the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon had already been struck by hijacked planes.

As Flight 93 bore down on Washington, President Bush was in the process of being evacuated out of Florida and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was out of pocket helping tend to the injured at the Pentagon. Darling noted that only the President and the Secretary of Defense are authorized to direct the military to use offensive lethal force, but



Retired Marine Lt. Col. Robert J. Darling
PHOTO BY DAVE ONGIE

with no time to waste, Cheney filled the void.

Cheney, who had served as chief of staff for President Ford and Secretary of Defense under George H.W. Bush, mobilized a pair of F-15s and gave them the order to take down Flight 93. While that decision was outside of protocol, Darling said Cheney's experience gave him the tools to take quick, decisive action under extreme pressure.

"This is the man that probably created those operational plans," Dar-

ling said. "We couldn't have had a better crisis leader at the helm at that very moment to get the U.S. military moving in that direction."

No one in the bunker under the White House could have known about the decisions being made on board Flight 93. After talking to their loved ones, Darling said the passengers on board were fully aware of the fate of the other three hijacked planes and made a selfless decision in an effort to save the lives of others. The passengers stormed the cockpit, and during the struggle, the plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania.

Evidence gathered at the scene indicated that the U.S. Capitol had been the target.

"But these passengers had something to say about that, and they stopped them in their mission to reach Washington D.C.," Darling said.

While crisis events are rare, Darling said every business and organization should strive to ensure employees and management is ready to respond in a quick, organized and decisive manner if and when a crisis strikes.

"We have conferences like this because this is about how we build community resilience," he said. "This is how America is going to stay strong." ■

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VCEDA Approves Grant for SRRA Sportsman's Complex in Dickenson County

An up to \$149,945 grant to the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority (SRRA) to be used to construct the first phase of a sportsman's complex in Dickenson County was awarded Sept. 24 by the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority.

"The growing tourism economy in Southwest Virginia is one of the areas VCEDA has assisted in extensively in the past several years," said VCEDA Executive Director/General Counsel Jonathan Belcher. "This new project by the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority will serve to add to the overall tourism economy in Virginia."

The Southwest Regional Recreation Authority ("SRRA") was formed by act of the General Assembly in 2008 for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a Southwest Regional Recreation Area, which was defined as "a system of recreational trails and appurtenant facilities, including trail-head centers, parking areas, camping facilities, picnic areas, recreational areas, historic or cultural interpretive sites, and other facilities that are a part of the system."

SRRA is best known for its development of the Spearhead Trails' ATV and multi-use trails in the region.

"SRRA believes it was created to fulfill a broader mission which encompasses all outdoor recreation," the grant application noted. In accordance with that goal, SRRA has launched what it refers to as a new non-motorized division and has developed a plan for a new sportsman's complex to include an archery center, rifle/pistol ranges and shotgun ranges. The first phase of the project will focus on construction of an archery complex.

As envisioned, SRRA Director Shawn Lindsey said the Spearhead Trails Archery Complex will be part of a larger project encompassing all recreational shooting sports. Multiple ranges will be constructed on an 85-acre site owned by Dickenson County on a site that was once a landfill. The site also has more than 35 acres of woods that an archery trail can be created on to hit up to 40 three-dimensional targets in four zones which include small game animal models with turkey, rabbits and other game models, deer in various positions and western plains animal models like



VCEDA Executive Director/General Counsel Jonathan Belcher, right, presents a ceremonial check representing the grant approved by VCEDA for the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority's (SRRA) planned sportsman's complex in Dickenson County to SRRA Executive Director Shawn Lindsey, second from right, and Jack McClanahan, SRRA chairman, second from left. Also on hand for the presentation was Mitzi Sykes, left, Dickenson County economic development director.

grizzly bears and bison. The project will include picnic areas with fire pits and grills, a restroom and self-pay station. A land use agreement is in place between SRRA and Dickenson County.

The VCEDA funds will be used toward site development, building(s) construction, the installation and/or improvement of trails, roads and utilities, the purchase of equipment, machinery, tools and structures and other improvements, as well as architectural, engineering and permitting costs.

Lindsey noted that SRRA first created trails in the region, but he suggested a piece of the tourism puzzle is finding ways to open the area to new tourists and then once they travel to the region, to keep them in the region longer by having additional offerings. The overall economic impact of the Sportsman's Complex, according to Lindsey, is estimated at \$3.1 million per year when the full project is completed.

The application projects one full-time job within one year. A copy of an economic study included with the application projects an estimated 32 full-time equivalent jobs from the overall sportsman's complex project, including jobs at the range itself, as well as those at hotels, restaurants, gas stations and other indirect and induced employment. [BJ](#)

Olan O. Jones, Jr., Eastman Credit Union's (ECU) CEO and president, announced his retirement effective January 1, 2020. After 22 years heading ECU, Jones says he is looking forward to spending more quality time with his wife, Sylvia, and their family and friends, as well as pursuing interests and hobbies.



Olan Jones

The announcement came in a release issued just days before the Sept. 29 passing of ECU's Chairman of the Board, Fielding Rolston, Jones' longtime friend. Jones and Rolston took the mantels of ECU CEO and Chairman, respectively, on the same day in 1998.

Regarding Jones' retirement, Rolston had said in the statement, "Olan came to ECU at an inflection point for the credit union industry and for ECU. He is a natural visionary and has always seemed to know what was just around the bend. However, I think his best attribute as a leader is that he truly cares about the people he serves. When Olan came to ECU, credit unions were just beginning to be recognized as serious alternatives for financial services and he was always striving to ensure that ECU was positioned to do the right things for all the stakeholders—members, staff, and communities."

For more than two decades, Jones guided ECU through



Fielding Rolston

changes, including the move from doing business with only Eastman Chemical Company employees and their families to seeing membership opened to everyone in the communities it serves. During that time, assets have increased from \$631 million to \$4.8 billion and ECU has received many "top-of-class" accolades on member service, member value, and financial stability.

During Jones' tenure as CEO, ECU returned more than \$118 million to members through the extraordinary dividend, created more than 650 new full-time jobs, added 200,000 new members, and donated more than \$8.9 million to support the improvement of communities we serve.

The board of directors also announced that Kelly Price, ECU executive vice president, will be appointed CEO and president effective January 1, 2020. Price comes to the CEO and president position with almost 25 years of extensive experience in several functions at ECU. Most recently she has been responsible for leading the Lending, Member Services, Operations, and Information Technology areas.

The ECU board is expected to elect a successor to Rolston at its next meeting. **BJ**

A large advertisement with a blue background. On the left, a woman with long brown hair and glasses is shown in profile, looking upwards and to the right with her hand to her chin in a thoughtful pose. She is wearing a denim jacket. On the right side of the image, the text "THINKING ON OUR FEET." is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below this, the website "CUMBERLANDMARKETING.COM" is written in smaller, white, sans-serif capital letters. In the bottom right corner, there is a white circular logo containing the letters "CM" in a bold, sans-serif font.

SVAM honors top manufacturers

The Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing (SVAM) hosted its annual Southwest Virginia Manufacturers' Awards Banquet in celebration of Manufacturing Day. Each year the event showcases the remarkable impact that industry makes on the Southwest Virginia region. The 2019 winners:

- Environmental Excellence Award Winner: Somic America
- Excellence in Safety Award Winner: Universal Fibers
- Manufacturing Innovations Award Winner: Appalachian Plastics, Inc.
- Community Impact Award Winner: Strongwell
- Manufacturer of the Year Winner: Tempur Sealy
- Community's Choice Award Winner: Strongwell

K-VA-T Food Stores named Certified Angus Beef Retailer of the Year

Food City, based in Abingdon, Va., was recognized as the Retailer of the Year by the Certified Angus Beef brand for leadership in product quality, marketing and sales. The award was presented at the brand's Annual Conference, held Sept. 23-25, in Asheville, N.C. Brand partners at the conference, including meat processors, distributors, chefs, retailers and cattle ranchers, explored merchandising and marketing solutions to satisfy growing consumer demand for beef.

Food City has offered the Certified Angus Beef brand for 20 years by having trained butchers in stores to cut the meat, wait on



(L-R) Certified Angus Beef Brand President John Stika, Food City Director of Meat Operations Steve Holloway, Food City Category Manager Meat/Seafood Jamie Tignor, Certified Angus Beef VP of Retail, David O'Diam

customers, help choose a cut and share preparation tips. Food City introduced Certified Angus Beef brand Prime in stores this year.

Promotions for Father's Day, summer grilling and holiday roasting drew customers to the meat case. Additionally, weekly circulars and in-store signage shared information about the brand's quality.

"Customers understand the difference and it's driven by the people in our stores," says Dan Gleib, executive vice president of marketing and merchandising. "Our commitment to having a strong, highly trained butcher in the store makes all the difference."

Steve Smith, president and CEO, says Food City's growth is based on supplying great quality products that customers trust. "The Certified Angus Beef brand plays right into that sweet spot for us because really center of the plate is so important to our customers." **BJ**

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An Appalachian Renaissance

by Mary Trigiani

Renaissance is rebirth. Every era of human history labeled as a renaissance shares common hallmarks: essential transition, intellectual flowering, and a questioning of the status quo. The renaissance of most notoriety, from roughly the 14th century through the 17th, gave light to rational thinking grounded in an appreciation of the past while not literally of it. As a result of a rationality enriched by art and cultural advances, a world of possibility was born. The thoughtful acknowledgement of the reality of situations and the development of actionable strategies meant more citizens had the opportunity to prosper.

That renaissance emerged out of necessity as well. A devastating plague left a smaller population who had to be practical and curious in order to survive. They had to form communities and collaborate to form courses of action. While intellectual pursuits might not have been the purview of all citizens of the time, they had to sharpen practical intellect and technical ability. Perhaps most fascinating, on each community's level, they had to perfect and develop their own personas. When aggregated, their specialties and competitive advantages lifted a world. They were stewards of their time and of future generations.

We are called to stewardship today, in our own region. American stewardship. The concept of only a few pulling the strings and bringing others to the table when convenient – a clearly outdated interpretation of power and influence – must give way to the fulfillment of a view of representation and input embodied in the birth of this nation. This is where our region can enliven its legacy of independent thought and strength – speaking truth to power while standing ready to shake hands and focus on what we have in common – not judging one another around factors that have little or nothing to do with the economic emergency we share.

Our leaders must deliver to our evolving legacy of participation and contribution. In due course, all will discover that daylighting their activities will deliver professional satisfaction through a compelling transparency, not back-room power. With our leaders, in every sector, we must recognize that each other's strengths and efforts would be exponentially more effective if we combine resources, climb over the disagreements, and muscle through them. Out in the open.

Here is what it means to think as stewards of an actual shared vision. Think about a hypothetical company, whose divisions are not acting under one purpose. The division managers meet fairly frequently, nod their heads in agreement to proposals for improving the company's top line and customer traction, yet leave the gatherings unable or unwilling to align with the



proposals or calls to action. Redundancies and duplication of effort are not the concern of the division heads. They are comfortable in their jobs, secure in their employment. These are their facts of work life because they are not held accountable for putting their resources to the mission, performing to the strategy, or explaining what they are doing. As long as they spend no more money than they have, they have performed.

This is the antithesis of stewardship. In good economic times, maybe a company can survive on legacy customer relationships, with excess budget devoted to feel-good programs without clear performance measures. Beyond not working in a challenging economy, however, this mindset also precludes the

acknowledgement that business practices must evolve. And this mindset is selfish. It delivers a kind of protectionism to certain classes of friends and family. Which leads to perhaps the most troubling consequence of all: leaders who might otherwise emerge in a healthy economy have no home in an ecosystem dominated by those who fear change and growth. Now extrapolate that hypothetical company into our very real region and you see what's at stake.

An Appalachian Renaissance is within our grasp, through true stewardship. Let's think big. Let's create a regional master plan that makes way for some big concepts. Examples include the following: Our region becomes a hotbed for rejuvenating the American middle class. Our region is the place to live, whatever one's life stage, because the cost of living combined with quality of life, arts, and access to natural resources are topnotch. Our region's consortium of education institutions [pre-school through higher education] offers a solid foundation for entrepreneurs and startups, from ideas, through training, to incubation and launch. Our region is industrial, with established companies ready to help newcomers plant here and introduce new career paths.

Beyond a solid ground of our track record of working and producing, we believe in self-reliance and fairness. Our desire to live in communities and support one another compensates greatly for the moments of fatalism that dominate some dark corners of the regional mindset – all of which come from a compulsion to hoard turf, an irrational fear of arrogance, and a reluctance to honor our humanity.

Now is not the time, out of trepidation, to retreat and reject. It is our time, our opportunity and our duty to create a new experience for all who choose to live in this remarkable place.

This is the final of a three-part editorial by Mary Trigiani, a veteran senior executive who most recently served in the banking industry.

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