

The Business Journal

of Tri-Cities Tennessee / Virginia

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The 27th Annual Salute to Emerging Stars of Our Region

Plus: Hard Rock says yes to Bristol and Crown Laboratories relocates JC corporate hq

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Office
423.854.0140
news@bjournal.com

Publisher
William R. Derby
bderby@bjournal.com
423.979.1300

Co-Publisher
Jeff Derby
jderby@bjournal.com
423.306.0104

Managing Editor
Scott Robertson
srobertson@bjournal.com
423.767.4904

Marketing Coordinators

Robin Williams
rwilliams@bjournal.com
423.794.6938

Allen Moore
amoore@bjournal.com
423.341.4888

Richard G. Preston
rgpreston@bjournal.com
423.262.7760


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



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Groundbreaking



I ran into an old friend at a basketball game recently. Years ago, he and I had spent considerable amounts of time bandying back and forth a parade of ideas about economic and community development, the role of the media in modern life and other such important but, for most folks, not terribly exciting topics. After we talked

basketball for a while he asked me, “so are you still excited about regionalism?”

I think he was surprised when I offered a positive response. I have been openly critical of some of the more obvious missteps made in the last few months by several parties, so perhaps I have given the impression I think we’re on the wrong track. Actually, I think some of the setbacks we’ve seen have been blessings.

Let’s take the Regional Economic Forum of Sept. 25. While it offered good information, it offended many, many, many people. Women, minorities, the entire population of Southwest Virginia, the city of Bristol, anyone who wanted a Q&A – all were left wondering how the private sector leaders of the region could have been so tone-deaf. Another important constituency that was off-put by the forum? Local and state government leaders. Anytime the governor of Tennessee is in town, it is just good form to invite the legislators from our regional delegation – especially for a regional event.

So, how is any of that a blessing? When the Mayors’ Blue-Ribbon Task Force met with the board of the First Tennessee Development District Nov. 13, the unannounced guest speaker was Mark Fuller, the ROSC Global consultant who’d delivered findings at the Sept. 25 forum. The private sector leaders paid what I suspect was more than a nominal fee to bring Fuller back down from Boston to speak directly

to local government leaders. It was, I suspect, a costly olive branch to offer the government officials who had been snubbed several weeks before.

The failures of the forum also brought Bill Greene, one of the five forum panelists back into the spotlight, as he appeared in a WJHL interview in November, telling Josh Smith, “If this issue doesn’t spring up from the people who live here and realize what we have, where we’re going and what we’re trying to do and becomes their issue, it doesn’t make any difference what Eastman or Ballard or East Tennessee State or Bill Greene the banker wants – it’s not going to happen.”

Amen, brother.

The biggest reason I’m still excited about regionalism is that the process now has run into the very same buzz saw that has doomed past efforts – private sector arrogance meeting public sector intransigence – and we appear to be seeing the beginnings of a change of mindset.

That’s never happened before. It should be encouraged. If the trend continues and other major private sector players begin to back more ideas that, as Greene says, “spring up from the people,” then the local government officials will have their own make or break moment.

This is another reason for positive thinking. Most local government leaders are at least in principle, supportive of the idea of investigating the opportunities regional approaches might create for solving problems in their own communities. There are still a few holdouts who try to pigeonhole every fact into a negative narrative, but again, there are more voices in favor than opposed.

The private sector leaders have never backed away from top-down thinking before.

The public sector leaders have never considered regional problem-solving approaches so seriously before.

There is still well-earned mistrust on both sides, to be sure, and those of us who support regionalism have a long row left to hoe.

That being said, new ground is being broken. To me, that’s exciting.



ECU's Jones feted at retirement celebration

The Board of Directors of Eastman Credit Union hosted a retirement celebration for outgoing CEO Olan Jones Nov. 13 at MeadowView Conference Resort and Convention Center. Jones, who took over as CEO after less than a year as COO in 1998, guided ECU as it grew into one of America's largest credit unions, with more than \$300 million in commercial loans and assets around \$4.5 billion. Jones told *The Business Journal* in May, "We've done a lot more than I expected we would ever do, and I'm very well satisfied with that."



Pending home sales continue increasing, growth rate slows

There were 769 Tri-Cities area new contracts (pending home sales) approved in October – nine more than September – and 98 more than October last year, according to Realtor Property Resource (RPR). It was the second straight month for the short-term seasonal slowing trend while the long-term trend continues a slow upward trajectory. The growth of the long-term trend peaked in February and has ebbed since then.

Northeast Tennessee Association of Realtors (NETAR) President Karen Randolph said historically low mortgage rates are a big factor in the resilience of the market as home prices continue increasing faster than wages, and the inventory remains as tight as it has been in decades.

Pending sales are a leading indicator of housing activity based on signed contracts for existing single-family homes, condominium, and townhome resales in the 11-county area monitored by the NETAR Trends Report. Since resales go under contract a month or two before the sale is closed, pending sales typically lead existing home sales by about two months.

Currently, it is not unusual to see up to 5 percent or more of the contracts fall through due to contract contingencies. October's closings accounted for almost 40 percent of the contracts awaiting closing. That percentage is the lowest preliminary closing rate so far this year. Expect it to increase with the adjustment in November's report. The closing rate has labored under the weight of contract contingencies this year. About 70 percent of new contracts face a contingency that has to be met before moving to closing. The most common contingencies are home inspections (60 percent), obtaining financing (48 percent), and an acceptable appraisal (47 percent).

So far this year, new listings are 6.5 percent better than the first 10 months of last year while new pending sales are up 20 percent. The region had 3.5 months of inventory in October. "That was a very small improvement from September and didn't alter the fact that market's sales pace continues to absorb inventory faster than it is being replaced," said NETAR data analyst Don Fenley.

SINGLE-FAMILY COUNTY MARKETS

County	Oct. Closings	Yy ch	Yy % ch	County	YTD Closings	YTD ch	YTD % ch
Sullivan	179	20	12.6%	Sullivan	1806	129	7.7%
Washington, TN	160	6	3.9%	Washington, TN	1540	199	11.4%
Greene	68	5	7.9%	Greene	600	54	8.4%
Hawkins	50	4	7.4%	Hawkins	470	12	2.5%
Washington, VA	44	8	22.2%	Carter	454	43	8.7%
Carter	43	17	28.3%	Washington, VA	422	25	5.6%
Wise	26	2	8.3%	Wise	196	17	8.0%
Scott	16	3	23.1%	Johnson	150	4	2.7%
Johnson	14	1	7.7%	Scott	121	19	18.6%
Lee	5	3	150.0%	Lee	38	2	5.6%
County	Oct. avg. price	Yy ch	Yy % ch	County	YTD avg. price	YTD ch	YTD % ch
Washington, TN	\$207,599	25,907	11.1%	Washington, TN	\$223,470	\$4,722	2.2%
Sullivan	\$202,867	32,257	18.9%	Washington, VA	\$189,804	\$6,249	3.4%
Johnson	\$187,017	15,338	19.0%	Sullivan	\$187,017	\$15,488	9.0%
Washington, VA	\$185,650	28,619	9.2%	Johnson	\$210,927	\$34,914	19.8%
Greene	\$177,661	33,541	19.2%	Greene	\$167,329	\$18,117	12.1%
Scott	\$160,877	1,893	26.3%	Carter	\$162,692	\$21,438	15.2%
Carter	\$156,106	1,893	1.3%	Hawkins	\$154,383	\$8,917	6.1%
Hawkins	\$155,758	8,448	5.7%	Wise	\$108,690	\$2,523	2.4%
Lee	\$101,680	10,820	10.0%	Scott	\$107,731	\$10,136	10.4%
Wise	\$99,421	9,073	10.0%	Lee	\$79,855	\$13,843	14.8%

Source: NETAR

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Hard Rock International agrees to operate Bristol casino

JLARC report cites opportunities, areas of concern

by Scott Robertson

A proposed casino project for the former Bristol Mall property picked up a good deal of momentum in late November. One day after Hard Rock International announced it had agreed to create “Hard Rock Casino Bristol,” the Virginia Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) released a report stating the creation of casinos in Bristol and four other communities would have a positive effect on the economies of the state and the communities.

The Rock

Hard Rock International issued a release Nov. 25 from its Hollywood, Fla., headquarters stating, “Hard Rock International, a global leader in the entertainment and hospitality industry, is pleased to announce a partnership with the Bristol Resort & Casino team to create Hard Rock Casino Bristol. Once final approval is received from the Commonwealth of Virginia and the citizens of Bristol, Virginia, Hard Rock, working with the local ownership group, will operate the proposed resort and casino.”

The release made it clear Hard Rock will push for those approvals by marketing itself to the community as a strong economic and tourism development partner. “Hard Rock has extensive experience making projects an integral part of the local community,” the release said. “Hard Rock’s reputation will make the property a major draw for visitors from across the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast. With the resort as a gateway to the region, the partners will use their resources to introduce visitors to the many other wonderful tourism, cultural and recreational opportunities available in the Tri-Cities and across Southwest Virginia.”

Jim McGlothlin, who along with partner Clyde Stacy founded the Bristol Resort and Casino effort by purchasing the former Bristol Mall off Exit 1 of Interstate 81, said the choice to go with Hard Rock as a resort and casino operator made sense based on the existing Bristol tourism industry’s base in the music industry. “Hard Rock’s iconic brand speaks to its deep roots in live music entertainment and world-class memorabilia collection, which will play a prominent role at Hard Rock Casino Bristol. This focus on music will complement our region’s country music heritage and dynamic music scene in the Twin City.

“After vetting multiple leaders in the industry, we are convinced that Hard Rock is the best fit for our project and our community,” McGlothlin said. “The Hard Rock team understands the significant economic development impact the Hard Rock Casino Bristol will have on the city and the entire surrounding region, in terms of new jobs and additional tax revenue. As seasoned casino resort operators, they are committed to working closely with us to maximize the benefits of this project for local residents while highlighting the many opportunities this region has to offer to all.”



Jim McGlothlin at the Bristol Mall, 2018 FILE PHOTO

The Hard Place

Final approval of Virginia State Senate Bill 1126, which would allow the creation of casinos in five Virginia localities if the residents of those communities approve the casinos via referendum, is expected in the coming session of the General Assembly. Whether the citizens of Bristol will vote in favor of allowing the creation of a casino in 2020 is still an open question. When plans for the casino were announced a year ago, several churches banded together to launch a grassroots campaign against it. Their yard sign campaign – “Don’t gamble Bristol’s future” was met with a similar campaign from casino proponents – “I’m betting on Bristol.”

The Nov. 26 release of the JLARC report, “Gaming in the Commonwealth” will likely provide talking points for both sides in the debate.

The report’s summary says Virginia will receive tax and direct economic benefits from allowing casinos to operate in Bristol, Danville, Norfolk, Portsmouth and Richmond, but cautioned against overstating that impact. “Casinos authorized in SB 1126 are projected to generate about \$260 million annually in state gaming taxes and have a positive, but modest economic impact on local economies,” the report summary states.



Hard Rock Resort and Casino, Lake Tahoe COURTESY HARD ROCK

The JLARC report relied on input from The Innovation Group, a gaming industry consultant, which said resort-style casinos would be sustainable in the five markets mentioned. “Casinos in these five locations are projected to annually generate about \$970 million in net gaming revenue and approximately \$260 million in gaming tax revenue for the state,” the report summary said. By way of comparison, the Virginia Lottery generates around \$600 million per year after prizes are paid out. Education proponents have expressed concerns the programs funded by the lottery could be hurt if casino gambling is allowed to cut into lottery play. The report confirmed Lottery proceeds for Virginia’s K–12 public education would be projected to decline around \$30 million per year if the casinos are approved.

The JLARC report also cautioned that the gaming market is not static, and more states are allowing casinos to be built. “About one-third of total casino revenue is projected to be generated by out-of-state visitors. Out-of-state visitors would contribute especially to the viability of the Danville and Bristol casinos because of their small local markets; this would also make them vulnerable if casino development were to occur in North Carolina and Tennessee.” Harrah’s already operates a casino resort in Cherokee, North Carolina.

One of the key arguments for the Bristol casino has been job creation. Southwest Virginia has the Commonwealth’s highest unemployment rates, and the population is decreasing markedly as families have left the region in search of better opportunities for prosperity elsewhere. The JLARC report paints a mixed picture of what casino employment gains will look like.

“Each casino is projected to employ at least 1,000 people, which would have a more meaningful impact in Bristol and Danville because of the relatively small size of their local labor forces. The projected median wage of \$33,000 for casino employees would be below the median wage in the five SB 1126 localities. Not all casino jobs would represent a net gain of employment for the localities, and nearly half of the jobs would be low-skill and low-wage. Still, many casino jobs would require higher levels of skill and pay higher wages.” Casino proponents argue that with Southwest Virginia’s economy struggling, any employment gains

Gaming in the Commonwealth

2019



The cover of the JLARC report issued Nov. 26

are worth making.

The report does not recommend whether Virginia should pursue additional forms of gaming, or what types of gaming should be pursued. It does, however, include several recommendations should the General Assembly choose to expand gaming. First among those is the establishment of a dedicated funding source for gambling addiction prevention and treatment. Second is that any casino-authorizing legislation include clauses mandating:

- applicants for a casino license submit a responsible gaming plan as part of their application, and casino operators obtain accreditation for responsible gaming practices;
- casino licenses be awarded through a competitive selection process, overseen by a designated committee whose members have experience in business finances and operations and represent state and local interests (how Hard Rock’s pre-existing agreement in Bristol would be factored into this would have to be addressed);
- an independent consultant, hired by the state, assess the accuracy and feasibility of casino development proposals (see above); and
- owners and officers of any company vying for a casino operators’ license submit to and pass in-depth background and financial investigations.

The Virginia General Assembly will convene Jan. 8, 2020. [B](#)

Regional Economic Development moving forward on several fronts

by Scott Robertson

November may not have been as loud a month for regional economic development proponents as September and October were, but it was a busy month nonetheless. A renewed effort to combine the Johnson City and Kingsport MSAs took root. Merger discussions intensified between the Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership, which oversees economic development for Carter, Unicoi and Washington counties; and NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership, which oversees economic development in Sullivan County and works with Hawkins County on a contract basis. The Mayors' Blue-Ribbon Task Force, formed by Joe Grandy and Richard Venable, the mayors of Washington and Sullivan counties, respectively, issued preliminary findings to a meeting of the First Tennessee Development District board, with another meeting planned. Meanwhile, across the state line, Invest SWVa's Will Payne returned from an industrial recruiting trip to Austria, Germany and Switzerland.



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Will Barrett PHOTO BY SCOTT ROBERTSON

Combining the MSAs

The idea of recombining the Johnson City and Kingsport metropolitan statistical areas surfaced a little over a year ago. At the time, *Business Journal* contributor Don Fenley contacted the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which oversees the delineation of MSAs and was told the traffic counts between Washington and Sullivan counties do not meet the statistical requirements to justify recombination.

During Congressman Phil Roe's regional economic development meeting in Kingsport Nov. 5, the *Business Journal* again raised the question of whether something could be done in Washington to move beyond that statistical roadblock. Congressman Roe spoke with the OMB and came back with a good news-bad news answer. "The OMB made clear that we do not meet the traffic counts on which these determinations are based," Roe said. "But, they did agree that sometime after the first of the year, they would be willing to take a conference call from people in business and economic development in our region to see if we could make a case."

"It has to be something that could work for more than just our region," Roe cautioned. "Something that only helps us won't work. But if we can show a sound argument that would also work somewhere else, the Tri-Cities in Washington State, for instance, then they would be willing to listen to that."

Combining the EDOS

The broad brushstrokes of a merger between NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership

and the Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership have been proposed in a 3.5-page document authored by NETWORKS CEO Clay Walker. Representatives from both organizations are studying the document.

"We're currently kind of cross-pollinating meetings," says NeTREP Chair Will Barrett. "So, we're going to the NETWORKS meetings. The NeTREP chair, vice chair, secretary and treasurer were at the NETWORKS executive committee meeting in November and (NETWORKS CEO) Clay (Walker) was at the NeTREP board meeting the other day."

A couple of members of the NETWORKS

board had questions for Barrett at the Nov. 13 executive committee meeting. In addition to doing what he could to answer them in that setting, Barrett said, he invited them to have additional direct conversations to provide total clarity and transparency.

Bill Sumner, NETWORKS board chair said, "I thought that executive committee meeting was just an outstanding get-together because we had really good exchanges of 'here's what we need to do next, here's what we're facing as we start putting the pieces together.' We're making really good progress."

The crux of Walker's proposal is

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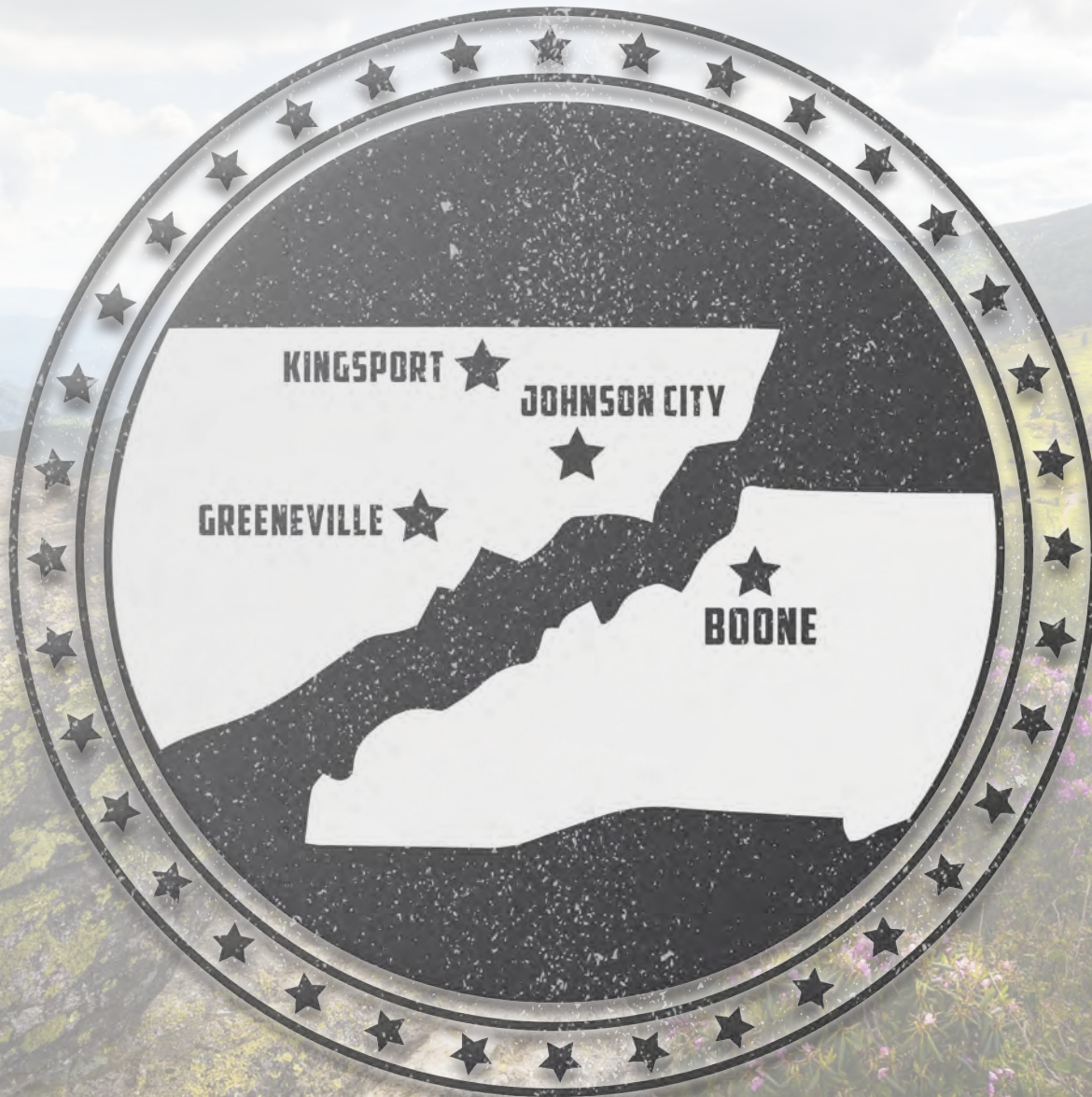
The 100+ year old Model Mill building, former home to General Mills Company, has been restored to its former glory to accommodate the new corporate headquarters for Summers-Taylor, Inc. as well as mixed use office, retail, and restaurant spaces. A highly visible gateway project, this local historic landmark anchors the north approach to the anticipated Walnut Street Corridor bridging the gap between downtown and ETSU's campus.



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40 Under Forty Honors Business Community's 2019 Rising Stars

A crowd of around 300 members of the Tri-Cities business community gathered Oct. 4 to fete this year's class of young professionals at the 27th Annual 40 Under Forty Gala at the Blackthorn Club in Jonesborough.

"These remarkable young individuals have distinguished themselves not only with their business acumen, but also with their drive to lead, and their commitment to serve the communities in which they live and work," said Scott Robertson, managing editor of *The Business Journal of Tri-Cities, TN/VA*, who introduced the honorees at the event. "Whether they be working their way up a corporate ladder, going it alone as hungry entrepreneurs, or crafting careers in the medical or not-for-profit sectors, these 40 men and women show the business community it will be in good hands in the future. At the same time, they serve to inspire other young

professionals to pursue success throughout the region."

Dr. Paula Masters, vice president of Health Programs for Ballad Health, congratulated the honorees on their success and their commitment to the region.

The Business Journal wishes to thank the Tri-Cities-based businesses that supported the event through sponsorship: Ballad Health; Blackburn, Childers & Steagall, the East Tennessee State University Roan Scholars program, Milligan College and Saratoga Technologies.

Special thanks also to Earl Neikirk of Neikirk Photography. Nominations for the 2020 class of 40 Under Forty will be sought beginning in late spring at the 4ounder.com website. Watch *The Business Journal* and our sister publication, *Johnson City News & Neighbor* for details.



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Dr. Caroline Abercrombie

Dr. Caroline Abercrombie is a professor in the Section of Medical Education at ETSU Quillen College of Medicine. You may know her better for her work the last two years as director of the Blue Plum Festival in downtown Johnson City. If not, you may have seen her handiwork as director of the annual Crumley House Polynesian Beach Party fundraiser. In the Quillen College, she captains numerous administrative and teaching projects, leads committees, and organizes everything from camps for high school students interested in medicine as a career to intricate interprofessional team education activities involving 250 students from the Colleges of Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, Public Health, and Allied Health. Abercrombie's leadership skills led one nominator to describe what he called, "A swirl of goodness and energy that follows in her wake. She brings people together for good. As she goes forward in her many worthy professional and charitable endeavors, she's always bringing along and empowering dozens of others."



Sherry Boswell

Sherry Boswell has risen from being a first-generation college student earning a business degree at King University to being a six-figure earner with a senior level position in the banking industry at a very young age. She has amassed that success by helping others. Boswell has worked with organizations like Eastern 8 to promote home ownership and has worked with those in the community who are less fortunate on credit repair, saving habits, and overall financial literacy. She's also an entrepreneur in her own right and an active advocate for animals who donates her time at the local shelter.



Teni Butler

Teni Butler arrived at Eastman with a position supporting cellulose esters manufacturing, but quickly established herself as a young leader, something she credits to her time as an athlete at the University of Arkansas. She was soon tabbed to lead complex projects that required building consensus between technology, manufacturing, and business functions within the company. In addition to her regular job duties, Butler is active in Eastman's engineering campus recruiting as well as the company's annual Engineering Week program to promote interest in STEM careers at local high schools and she is a member and the current chair of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers East Tennessee Local Section.



Jurnee Carr

"Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation." That verse from Isaiah became the cornerstone for Jurnee Carr's entrepreneurial career. Carr and her father have built Zion Stone, a local stone veneer manufacturer on faith and principles. Along the way, Zion Stone has won the Kingsport Times News Reader's Choice Award for "Best Stone, Brick or Block Dealer" and the KOSBE Award for "Manufacturing Excellence" while creating 20 new jobs in the region. At the same time, Carr's Jurnee's Journey Foundation has directly provided services and funding for almost 300 spay/neuter surgeries, including tens of thousands of dollars in direct support for utility bills and vet bills for local shelters and rescues.



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Casey Carringer

Casey Carringer serves as director of Clinical Engagement for Ballad Health. Her responsibilities focus on effective implementation of Ballad's population health plan by partnering with the regional practice-based community. She is the project director on a federal grant to reduce substance use disorder in our region. Carringer was recently asked to present to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. An active member of First Christian Church, she currently sits on the Junior League of Johnson City board, where she is president-elect, as well as the board of Northeast Tennessee Perinatal Mental Health Alliance. At Ballad, Carringer applied for and was awarded a very competitive, large sum Health Resources and Services Administration grant. She will serve as the lead on this grant which is focused on implementing ground level strategies for rural communities to prevent residents from entering into addiction, expand community supports and scale evidence-based recovery and treatment.

Tara Chadwell

Tara Chadwell is the director of the Children's Resource Center at Niswonger Children's Hospital and Ballad Health. Prior to taking her current position, Chadwell served as the Trauma Injury Prevention Coordinator at Johnson City Medical Center. As director, she is responsible for many of the programs that foster health, wellness, and safety for the region's children. She runs the Morning Mile program in local schools that keeps kids active and fosters a healthy lifestyle. Chadwell oversees literacy initiatives, bike safety, water safety, and has been the director of the Scarecrow Skedaddle since it began. Some honorees have careers and community involvement interests that are worlds apart. For Tara Chadwell, it's truly one and the same.



Donny Chia

After nearly 15 years as an investment banker in New York City, Donny Chia joined Eastman in 2015 as director of Corporate Development, including responsibility for mergers and acquisitions activity worldwide. In 2017, he was promoted to be the youngest vice president at Eastman. This year, he was also appointed to the role of treasurer, responsible for looking after Eastman's balance sheet and cash flows, including collecting and managing approximately \$10 billion in cash annually. As treasurer, Chia's duties include global cash management, capital markets & hedging, enterprise risk management and insurance, pension and investments, and credit and accounts receivable. As head of Corporate Development, he is responsible for corporate portfolio strategy and the execution of merger, acquisition, divestiture, and joint venture transactions. Chia is a member of Eastman's Senior Leadership Team and the Eastman PAC Advisory Council. He also coaches little league baseball.

Zac Clark

2018 was Zac Clark's first year as a general manager in the Appalachian League. His Johnson City Cardinals broke their attendance record, gained numerous new corporate partners, increased their community service hours, and implemented promotions that had never been tried before. Clark was presented the 2018 Appalachian League Executive of the Year Award. He also accepted the Team Organization of the Year Award and Promotional Trophy Award for the 2018 season on behalf of the organization. The Cardinals also received the Johnson City Press Readers Choice Award for Best in Family Entertainment. Clark founded "The Alliance," through the ETSU Sport Management Program, an organization that provides networking opportunities for young professionals in the sports industry. He also serves on the board for the United Way of Johnson City/Washington County, YP-Tri, and Johnson City Visitors Bureau.



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Caleb Cupp

Caleb Cupp's first position with Sodexo was at the Millennium Centre in Johnson City, Tenn., setting up rooms and audio-visual equipment for client events. He eventually progressed into a supervisory role and assumed the role of interim executive chef. When Sodexo won the food service contract at Eastman Chemical, Cupp was promoted to retail manager and was instrumental in both the remodeling and the successful launch of eight cafés inside the Eastman plant. Cupp was subsequently awarded the position of director of Operations. Cupp was recently selected to fill the role of area general manager for Sodexo at Eastman. Said one nominator, "Caleb exemplifies the spirit of today's young professional, that of someone whose first reaction to being handed a challenge is to say, 'Yes, we can.'"

Misty Deskins

Misty Deskins joined the Food City team in 2003, accepting a full-time position as operations clerk for the corporate headquarters in Abingdon, while attending The University of Virginia's College at Wise as a full-time student. She has risen through the ranks to director of Loyalty Marketing. Deskins is responsible for guiding initiatives including personalized and targeted marketing, customer data and analytics, customer loyalty rewards, associate rewards, affinity partnerships, loyalty clubs and special events for the company's 132 retail locations. Her team helps coordinate the annual Food City Charity Golf Tournament, which raised over \$1.4 million for local charities this year and is also responsible for numerous local Kid's Club events, plus Family Race Night, Plumb Alley Day, Rhythm and Roots, Haunted Hill and Dolly Parton's Stampede Whoadeo.



Jennifer Dixon

Jennifer serves as business analyst for Smarty Pants, a firm based in the Tri-Cities that does market research with dozens of Fortune 500 clients. She currently manages and analyzes the back end of every domestic and international project at Smarty Pants to ensure financial integrity and operational excellence. One nominator said, "She brought new, bright ideas and technological expertise to the company and immediately transformed finance, legal and risk management into properly functioning, operationally excellent departments at a company already known for cutting edge research." In the community, she organized and headed up a shark tank competition for regional high school students at a First Tennessee Development District event called Career Quest Tennessee...It's all about business.



Matthew Dotson

Matthew became a name partner in the law firm of Mullins, Harris, Jessee & Dotson at the age of 28, having been at the firm for only 28 months at the time. His partners praise his work ethic, leadership skills, intelligence and interpersonal communication skills. Community members praise the same traits, but as applied to his work with Kiwanis Club and the First Church of God in Wise. One nominator, a judge and 40 Under Forty alumnus, called Dotson's rise into prominence in the Southwest Virginia legal community, "somewhat amazing," crediting it to Dotson's commitment to the firm and the community.





Kristina Dulaney

A life experience that was at one time debilitating has served to launch Kristina Dulaney's life passion to help others. Dulaney is founder of Cherished Mom, the mission of which is to promote awareness and education for perinatal mood disorders and the importance of self-care to new moms, families, healthcare professionals and the community. Dulaney is a vocal advocate for eliminating the stigma surrounding mental health disorders. Her own personal journey of overcoming postpartum psychosis is inspiring. Her founding of Cherished Mom, her vulnerability in sharing her story on various media platforms, as well as her support of and advocacy for postpartum moms have allowed her to become a nationwide advocate for women facing the unique struggle of postpartum depression, anxiety, and psychosis.

Dr. Jacob Fait

Tusculum University's College of Business has reached impressive heights since Dr. Jacob Fait was selected as its dean. One of the most impressive has been accreditation with the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs, achieved in late 2018. Through his leadership and in partnership with his team, the Master of Business Administration program has achieved record institutional enrollment for two straight academic years. In addition, the College of Business is earning impressive national rankings and developing new partnerships. At the center of these accomplishments is Dr. Fait, who is constantly seeking ways to advance the quality of the College of Business. At the same time, Dr. Fait remains committed to the community. He is driven to ensure the success of the VITA program, of which the College of Business is a participant. VITA is an Internal Revenue Service initiative designed to support free tax preparation service for the underserved.




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Casey Carringer
Director of Clinical Engagement
Ballad Health

Casey is one of the leaders of Ballad Health's population health team, with a focus on collaborating with community partners to improve the region's health. She is spearheading two major grants to help fight addiction and substance use disorder — one of the major health problems in our region. Outside of work, Casey is active in her church and as a leader in several nonprofit groups that help the community.



Tara Chadwell
Director of Children's Resource Center
Niswonger Children's Hospital
and Ballad Health

Tara is responsible for many of the programs that foster health, wellness and safety for our children, including the Morning Mile™, a before-school walking/running program giving children the chance to start each day in an active, fun way incorporating music, friends and a rewards system, as well as initiatives for literacy, bike safety and water safety. Her efforts within Niswonger Children's Hospital and in the community are truly making a difference in the lives of children.



Shyam Odeti, MD
Hospitalist, Johnston Memorial Hospital

Dr. Odeti, as a leader of Johnston Memorial Hospital's hospitalist group, has been instrumental in a range of teaching and quality improvement initiatives that help not only his co-workers but the community as a whole. He has also been a key player in implementing the residency programs at Johnston Memorial Hospital and has earned recognition from the American Academy of Family Physicians and the Virginia Association of Family Physicians.



Ashley Sant
Pharmacist, Ballad Health

As one of only about 3,000 Board Certified Oncology Pharmacists in the nation, Ashley has important responsibilities with Ballad Health, including medication management for all Ballad Health Cancer Centers. She's also active in the community preparing meals for the Ronald McDonald House, supporting animal shelters, raising donations for school supplies, and assisting various holiday causes. Simply put, Ashley is always serving others.



Dr. Ronda Gentry

Gentry currently serves as the executive director of the Office of Student Persistence and Engagement at Tusculum University. She is also director for the Center for Civic Advancement, which includes the Office of Career Services, the Bonner Leader Program, Service Learning, and the Center for Global and Mission Studies. Gentry was selected this year to be one of just 25 faculty members in the nation for a multidisciplinary seminar at DePaul University that fostered growth in interfaith understanding. She has also developed courses and a lecture series on interfaith education. She is a magnet for students of all backgrounds and ages who seek guidance and support, but she also provides valuable assistance to those who report to her. As a community servant, Dr. Gentry provided leadership as a member of the board of directors for A Safe Harbor Home in Greeneville, where she also served as the chief governance officer.

Bradley Hoover

At the Kingsport Chamber, Bradley Hoover manages or assists with Visit Kingsport's more than 30 special events annually. In 2019 he took on a greater role with Fun Fest, serving as the liaison to each band and tour manager during the three nights of concerts. In addition to his professional responsibilities at Visit Kingsport, Hoover is involved in the Kingsport community in other ways. He currently serves as Civic Volunteerism Chair for Kingsport's young professional group PEAK and recently received the Paul Harris Fellow award from Rotary of Downtown Kingsport. Hoover has volunteered with numerous community projects including the Santa Train, Darrell's Dream Boundless Playground, and the Johnson Elementary School playground project. This year he was named Civic Volunteerism Chair on the PEAK Advisory Board. Said one nominator, "his is the epitome of the servant's heart."



Congratulations to Mark Lafever and Jenna Moore!

Business Journal
2020 40 Under
Forty Honorees



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Nicole Hughes

The direction of Nicole Hughes' life changed the night her son Levi drowned. Hughes was further disheartened when she learned drowning was the leading cause of death for children Levi's age, yet they had been to the pediatrician just weeks before and the doctor had talked about body weight and mosquito bites without a word of warning. What keeps this from being pure tragedy, and the reason Hughes is honored among the 40 Under Forty, is what she did with the pain and the anger. She founded a non-profit organization, "Levi's Legacy" focusing on drowning prevention for children. And she challenged all those pediatricians. Recently, she partnered with the American Academy of Pediatrics and co-authored their updated swim policy. That policy today is shared with every pediatrician in the country. Other children have a greater chance of living today because she refused to accept Levi's passing as the end of Levi's Legacy.

Lauren Johnson

Lauren Johnson is a chemical engineer working in sustainability at Eastman. The company has been performing lifecycle analyses on its products, assessing its portfolio, and Johnson has been instrumental in that. Her expertise in sustainability is so well-respected that she represented Eastman in the World Business Council for Sustainable Development's Portfolio Assessment Project for the Chemicals Sector. Johnson is currently redesigning Eastman's portfolio assessment framework and will be relaunching it this year. Through this work, she is ensuring that Eastman project leaders consider sustainability drivers in their projects early. Sustainability will be embedded in Eastman's innovation and stage gate projects thanks to Johnson's vision and dedication.



Misty Deskins
Director of Loyalty Marketing
K-VA-T Food Stores, Inc.

Congratulations to MISTY DESKINS

AND ALL THE HONOREES SELECTED TO THE 2019 TRI-CITIES TN/VA
Business Journal's **40 UNDER FORTY.**

"Misty began her career at Food City while completing her education at The University of Virginia's College at Wise. She has significantly developed her knowledge during her 16-year career, having served in a number of roles. Her current position in Loyalty Marketing is focused on personalized marketing, customer loyalty rewards, and community partnerships. She also helps coordinate a number of special events throughout our market area. Misty certainly has a bright future with our company and we're very proud to celebrate this much-deserved honor."

Steven C. Smith

Steven C. Smith, Food City President/CEO





Heather Keene

Heather Keene is playing an instrumental role in Tusculum University's efforts to improve health care in Northeast Tennessee and other parts of Central Appalachia. As associate vice president of the College of Health Sciences, which is establishing innovative programs such as the Niswonger College of Optometry, Keene is helping shape key initiatives. She has written feasibility and self-studies and assisted with documents needed for handbooks, committees and accreditation. In addition, she serves as director of Professional Student Advancement for the Niswonger College of Optometry, an adjunct professor for the College of Business, and the liaison between the College of Health Sciences and the university's Student Services division. Literally a coal miner's daughter, she applied intellect and work ethic to rise through the ranks from receptionist to executive vice president to associate vice president of the College of Health Sciences. She has also brought recognition to the community through her selection for the Women in Education Leadership Conference at Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Jessica Kelso

Jessica Kelso serves as director of Veterans Affairs at Northeast State Community College. Veterans returning to civilian life face many obstacles beyond the classroom. Kelso helps ease this transition with skill and sensitivity. Her office hosts veterans-only orientations, service events, and tutoring opportunities. The office also manages Veterans Centers on three Northeast State campuses. Not only is her dedication and professionalism on display during regular work hours, but also during weekend visits to various local Guard and Reserve units throughout Northeast Tennessee. The purpose of these visits, which are conducted on her own time, are to brief military personnel on their VA education benefits. She assists veteran students with a myriad of issues, which have ranged anywhere from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to Traumatic Brain Injury to day-to-day challenges faced by all college students.



Congratulations

Zac Clark
Jenna Moore
&
Mark Lafever

40 Under Forty Winners



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Mark Lafever

In addition to his work as operations supervisor at Unicoi County Utility, Mark Lafever is also an entrepreneur, part of the ownership group of Erwin Outdoor Supply. He was one of the driving forces behind the formation of RISE, the Unicoi County-based young professionals organization. At his heart, however, says one nominator, Lafever is a public servant. He was first elected as an alderman in Erwin more than a decade ago. The same year he also began serving as a Commissioner of the Unicoi County Gas Utility District (UCGUD). In 2011, he began a full-time position as Public Works Director for the Town of Erwin where he successfully managed Phase 2 and Phase 3 of Erwin's Downtown Revitalization project. He was selected to return to public service again as an alderman in February 2016. In January 2019, he was appointed vice mayor of Erwin.

Dale Ledford

Dale Ledford is one of the most popular and inspirational professors at Northeast State Community College primarily because of his innovative and inspirational teaching techniques. Ledford was diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome when he was in first grade. He had teachers tell him that he would never amount to anything while in K-12 and he was later rejected from an education program at a four-year university because they felt no school system or college would ever hire him due to the Tourette's. Ledford walked out of being rejected from the education program straight to class and volunteered to be a research assistant for one of his professors. He continued to receive his Master of Science degree with the same professor as his mentor. Ledford received his Associate of Science from Northeast State and completed his Master of Science in Biology at ETSU. He has worked at Northeast State for ten years starting as an adjunct professor and now serves as a full-time professor.



Brandon Mowell
District Manager, District 3
K-VA-T Food Stores, Inc.

Congratulations to **BRANDON MOWELL** AND ALL THE HONOREES SELECTED TO THE 2019 TRI-CITIES TN/VA *Business Journal's* **40 UNDER FORTY.**

"Brandon's more than 20-year career with our company began at the young age of 16, as a Courtesy Clerk for our Rogersville, TN store. After High School, he became a full-time associate and entered into our Meat Cutter Training Program. Since then, his career has really taken off and includes the roles of Store Manager for our Kingsport and Rogersville locations and a number of other special project assignments. Brandon now serves as a District Manager, responsible for 13 high volume Food City stores throughout Hawkins and Sullivan Counties in TN and Scott, Lee, Wise and Dickenson Counties in Virginia. He is a born leader and a pleasure to work with. He has a very bright future with our company. We're very proud to have Brandon as part of our Food City team and we certainly congratulate him on this great honor."

Steven C. Smith

Steven C. Smith, Food City President/CEO





Dr. JD Madill

Dr. JD Madill's story is just like that of every other Canada-native former University of Georgia baseball player turned Northeast Tennessee construction company owner who's gone on to become a successful chiropractor. He serves on the Tri-Cities Advancement Council (Ballad Health Foundation Board). He just completed a term as president of the Johnson City Morning Rotary Club and is still an active member. In his early 20s he formed a construction company before pursuing his doctorate. At age 26 he formed Foundation Health Services, now with two locations in the region. In five years, it has grown into a multi-specialty healthcare company that provides medical, physical therapy and chiropractic services. He also opened Foundation Academy, a fitness facility, in 2018. In his spare time Madill renovates homes for resale.

Jason Meredith

Jason Meredith began his career in the city of Kingsport's planning department, where he quickly earned a reputation for being detail-minded and smart. He led the Historic Zoning Commission in establishing the Civil War Trails Kingsport site. His ability to get things done and lead others caught the eyes of those who nominated Meredith for the State Government Affairs Council Program in 2015 and Leadership Kingsport in 2012. By the time Meredith was 32, he was employed as the state government affairs representative eventually managing nationwide state legislative and regulatory affairs for Eastman. Meredith also has developed strategic relationships with key officials in various states, allowing him to explore and implement tax incentives that may be available to Eastman through planned expansion efforts. His reputation among his peers is evidenced by his having been named chair of the American Chemistry Council's (ACC) State Government Affairs Committee. He's a deacon in his church and has the courage to be a youth basketball referee.



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Austin Ramsey

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Jenna Moore

Jenna serves as Director of Sales for the Johnson City Convention and Visitors Bureau. When she arrived, she set about to bringing not just the sales, but the entire online outreach program of the CVB up to a new level. She created the CVB's Instagram account. And all those motorcycle groups you see around the Tri-Cities on the weekends? She brought most of them here. She's been responsible for bringing in multiple 500-room-night events from Gold Wings to Southern Crusiers to Miata owners. Moore was also responsible for bringing in the Geico Hot Bike Tour, in which our region hosted more than 12,000 attendees including 2,200 registered "long riders." In 2019, Moore hosted 12 bloggers whose articles reached more than 28 million people. She also recruits meetings and conferences. She currently serves as vice president for Young Professionals of the Tri-Cities, a position she has held for the past three years. She recently finished serving 18 months on Johnson City's Sesquicentennial Commission.

Cole Morgan

If you're a customer of Bristol Tennessee Essential Services, you probably owe Cole Morgan a thank you note. His title is working foreman, but that belies the amount of work he does above and beyond that call. For instance, Morgan oversaw all the substation work needed to implement BTES's automation system that has helped save customers more than \$12 million in the last four years. He is a member of the Continuous Improvement Team at BTES which led the organization in achieving the nation's highest honor for quality in 2017 – the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. He also serves as the president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) group at BTES. In his off time, he is a quiet but extremely generous supporter of Tri-State Baptist Children's Home and the Niswonger Children's Hospital.





Bradley Hoover was recently honored as one of Tri-Cities 40 Under Forty!

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Congratulations Dr. Caroline Abercrombie!

Business Journal 40 Under Forty honoree

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Brandon Mowell

Brandon Mowell began his career with Food City as a courtesy clerk in 1998. What started as a part-time “high school job” has quickly become an impressive career. His nominators credit that to Mowell’s hard work, determination, professionalism and leadership abilities. He has risen quickly in the Food City family to become the district manager for this region. In this role, he successfully leads the operations for 13 Food City stores in Sullivan and Hawkins counties in Tennessee and Scott, Lee, Wise and Dickenson counties in Virginia. His stores are among the most successful in the Food City chain thanks, his nominators say, to his strong business leadership. Mowell has completed all of the company’s management training programs, including Mega Star, Dale Carnegie and the National Grocers Association executive leadership program. Mowell also serves on the Board of Directors for the Kingsport Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Paige Niles

Dr. Paige Niles is a 26-year-old physical therapist and director of a private practice orthopedic physical therapy clinic in Johnson City called PT Solutions Physical Therapy. Niles has rapidly grown her clinic by three-fold in productivity and patient satisfaction rising to the 96th percentile rank among all outpatient PT clinics nationwide. She has initiated partnerships with the Wellness Center, the Goose Chase, Tri-cities school districts, Fleet Feet, JC Running Club, Dawn of Hope, ETSU and Milligan College. Niles is a current clinical instructor for Doctorate of Physical Therapy students at ETSU.

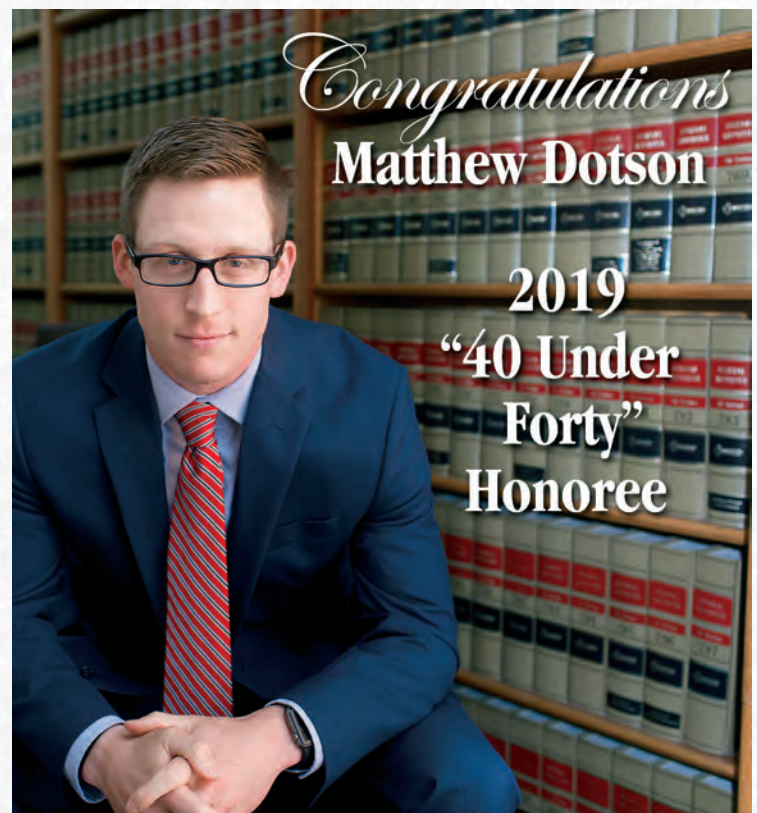


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★ Dr. Ronda Gentry ★

★ Dr. Jacob Fait ★

★ Ms. Heather Keene ★



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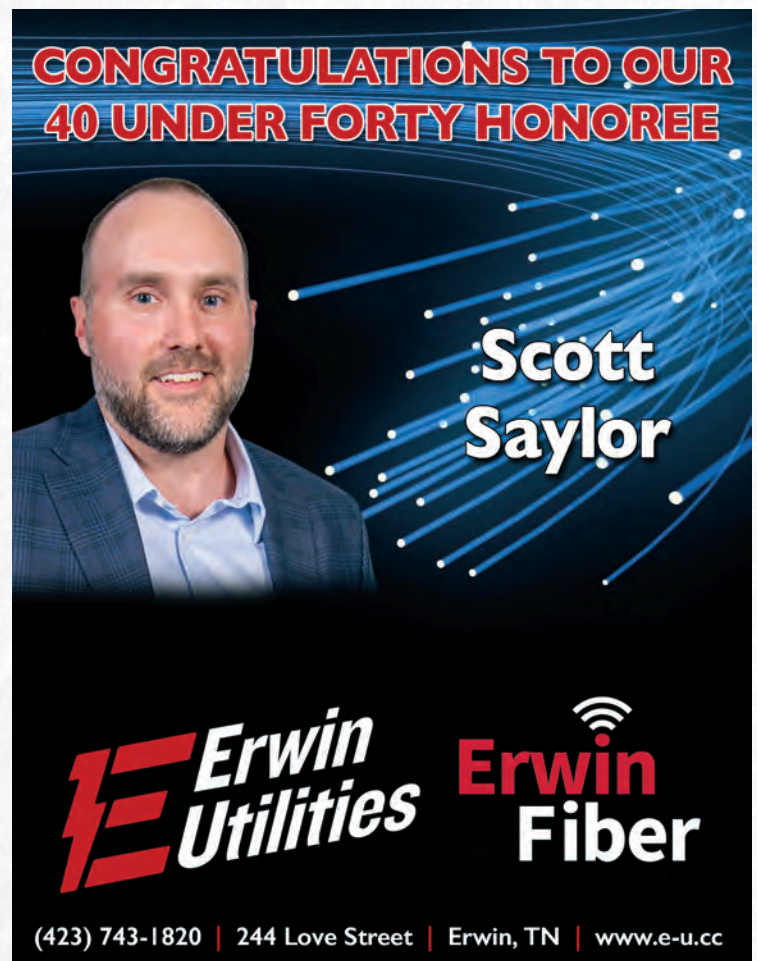


Dr. Shyam Odeti

Dr. Shyam Odeti, as a leader of the hospitalist group, has been instrumental in team-building with all other groups of physicians at Johnston Memorial Hospital in Abingdon, to the benefit of both the hospital and its patients. For example, his collaboration with emergency medicine leaders to create an evidence-based chest pain initiative has helped patients avoid unnecessary hospitalizations, resulting in millions of dollars in savings. In 2018, the American Academy of Family Physicians recognized that effort and his leadership by awarding Odeti and his team the Best Quality Improvement Project of the Year. He was also a key player in implementing Family Medicine and Internal Medicine residency programs at JMH. Since their inception he has worked to train and develop future physicians. This work was recognized with Teacher of the Year honors for him in 2018 by the Virginia Association of Family Physicians.

Landon Owen

Landon Owen is the senior director of Ticket Sales and Operations at Bristol Motor Speedway. In addition to overseeing ticketing efforts for NASCAR race events, Owen's ticketing leadership significantly contributed to The Battle at Bristol college football event setting the world record at 156,990 attendees welcomed to the Last Great Colosseum. He also helps give back to younger individuals who want to work in sports marketing. Last year, Owen organized a professional meet and greet that introduced 30+ sport organizations to more than 200 undergraduate sport management students. He's also active not only in Speedway Children's Charities events, but in the United Way, and Day of Community Service as well as the ETSU sports management advisory board and the Roan Scholars screening committee.





Sarah Presnell

Sarah Presnell is a manager in the Blackburn, Childers & Steagall tax department. She is the firm's nonprofit tax expert, in addition to preparation and review of individual and business tax returns, consultation on business transactions and other tax-related matters. She also serves the firm with her involvement in recruitment and retention, employee evaluation, internal leadership program, and the marketing committee. A passionate advocate for children in the region, Presnell serves as the vice president of the Board of Directors for Hands On! Discovery Center and the board president for Isaiah 117 House. One of her nominators from Isaiah 117 House says Presnell is referred to there as, "the calm in the storm."

Austin Ramsey

Austin Ramsey is a Roan Scholar, a member of the National 4H GIS Leadership Team and a computer and technology consultant in the Tri-Cities. He has become a sought-after consultant by local individuals and firms. While maintaining a 3.96 GPA with a major in computing, Ramsey launched his newest business venture while a student at East Tennessee State University. He provides computer-consulting services to clients through the company he founded, Pointech, LLC. Last summer Ramsey took his technological skills to northern India, where he used dronography to assist a non-profit that builds wells to provide rural villages with clean water. Back home, Ramsey and his team are leading the way in equipping communities with data and insights to help address some of the region's most intransigent health challenges.



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Brian Tibbs



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Sunny Sandos

At only 35 years of age, Sunny Sandos is already past-president of the Washington County Bar Association and is the first female staff attorney for the city of Johnson City. Outside of her new role for the City, Sandos serves her community as chair for the Planned Giving and Endowment Council for Munsey Church; treasurer of the Washington County Bar Association; and, as a member of the Johnson City Leadership 2020 Class. She is also on faculty with the National Business Institute and previously taught as an adjunct professor of Communications Law at ETSU. Prior to role at the City, Sandos practiced municipal law and civil defense litigation for two local firms and served as the executive director of Planned Giving for the ETSU Foundation.

Dr. Ashley Sant

Being one of only about 3,000 Board Certified Oncology Pharmacists in the nation, Dr. Ashley Sant has the responsibilities of medication management for all of Ballad Health Cancer Centers. She works closely with prescribers to ensure proper chemotherapy regimens are followed and even aids prescribers in adapting chemotherapy regimens for individual patients. When Sant isn't working for Ballad Health, she enjoys running marathons which raise money for organizations as St Jude's and Race for the Cure. She also cooks each month for the Ronald McDonald House and helps raise donations for animal shelters and school supplies. Sant has been very active in collecting donations of food for families at Thanksgiving, presents for kids at Christmas through Adopt A Star, candy for the Ballad Trunk-or-Treat and Easter baskets. She is also a BeachBody coach and motivates many women to be their physical and mental best.



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Scott Saylor

When a coach gets a new player he thinks has the potential to be great, sometimes he'll give that player a monumental challenge to complete in front of the entire team. Scott Saylor has volunteered on the sidelines for the Unicoi County Blue Devils football squad, so it came as no surprise to him when, shortly after he arrived at Erwin Utilities, his boss said to him, "alright, you've been here a week. Inventory the whole warehouse." Not only did Saylor complete the task accurately and in a timely fashion, he streamlined warehouse processes while doing so. Today, he is director of purchasing and warehouse, and the whole Erwin Utilities team knows they'll have what they need when they need it. Away from work, Saylor goes to extraordinary lengths to assist young people in need in Unicoi County. One nominator said, 'you never see his name in the paper, but he is a rock for this community.'



Stacey Sheffey

Stacey Sheffey serves as the human resources benefits administrator at BrightRidge. She is responsible for handling benefits for over 180 employees, onboarding new hires, and other HR matters. Said one nominator, Sheffey epitomizes Steven Covey's habit of "Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood" when seeking to disseminate information. Sheffey is active in the community, participating in the United Way Vello reading program, volunteering for the Special Olympics Track & Field events, and packaging food for the Hunger to Hope ministry. She also coordinates company activities to benefit the community such as a food drive for the Washington County Animal Shelter, a food drive for the Second Harvest Food Bank, a school supply drive for Good Samaritan Ministries, and participation in the United Way Week of Caring.



Corey Shipley

First in his family to attend college, Corey Shipley began practicing law in 2014, and served as special assistant U.S. Attorney in 2015-16. With his partner, Shipley now operates his own firm, Collins Shipley, PLLC, in Greeneville. It is a different thing to be not only an attorney, but also a business owner who, along with just one other person, must pay the rent, the employees and all the other bills for a firm," said one nominator. "Corey does that by being the first attorney in town to arrive at work and the last to leave." In what time is left between his legal obligations and time with his family, Shipley is the Greeneville president for Junior Achievement of the Tri-Cities and serves on the board of the United Way.



Ashley Shutt

Ashley Shutt is an entrepreneur and co-founder of ARO Creative Inc., a minority-owned marketing company in downtown Kingsport. From the onset of ARO Creative, Shutt's business model provides her the time and resources to help other startup companies in the region and beyond. She works with community organizations like Boys and Girls Club, Second Harvest Food Kitchen, Streamworks and the Inventor Center, where she offers marketing strategy and design services free of charge. She donates her services and experience to advise inventors and aspiring business owners, encouraging their ideas and strategizing pathways to success. Shutt is also the creator of MADE, a formal entrepreneurial event unlike anything seen in our region. The event highlights makers, artists, designers and entrepreneurs in an evening where their art is celebrated in a gala setting. The event, in partnership with Downtown Kingsport Association, features downtown locations to promote what is available there.



Brian Tibbs

Brian Tibbs is one of Marion, Va.'s true success stories. A child of Sugar Grove Elementary School, Tibbs grew up in Marion, then worked for the Barter Theatre in Abingdon for a few years before heading off to make his mark in sunny Orlando. Unfortunately, his entry into the world of big-time entertainment coincided with the coming of the Great Recession, and Tibbs ended up wearing a Dudley Do-Right costume and sweeping popcorn at Universal Studios theme park. He credits that time for teaching him the work ethic that has made his time as executive director for the historic Lincoln Theatre a success. In a short time, Brian has transformed the programming to offer not only a wider variety, but a much fuller catalog of programs that continues to grow the Lincoln into an economic generator for the town and for the region. Said one nominator, "The work that Brian does both in and out of the Theatre is vital to the success of Marion and our growing tourism economy."

Tiphany Watson

Tiphany Watson serves as the customer support manager at BrightRidge. She is responsible for supervising thirty employees in the Customer Support department, which includes call center, walk-in center, cashiers, and account services. Watson rose from bilingual customer service to management, according to one nominator, by learning every job in her department, then proving she could create efficiencies, thus improving how BrightRidge does business. She has served on the Customer Support Leadership Team and has been a speaker for Technology Day of the Chamber of Commerce Leadership 2020 program. She achieved the Certified Power Supervisor designation from the Tennessee Valley Public Power Association (TVPPA). Watson also represents BrightRidge at the National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC) Members Information Conference. Como se dice excellence in action?



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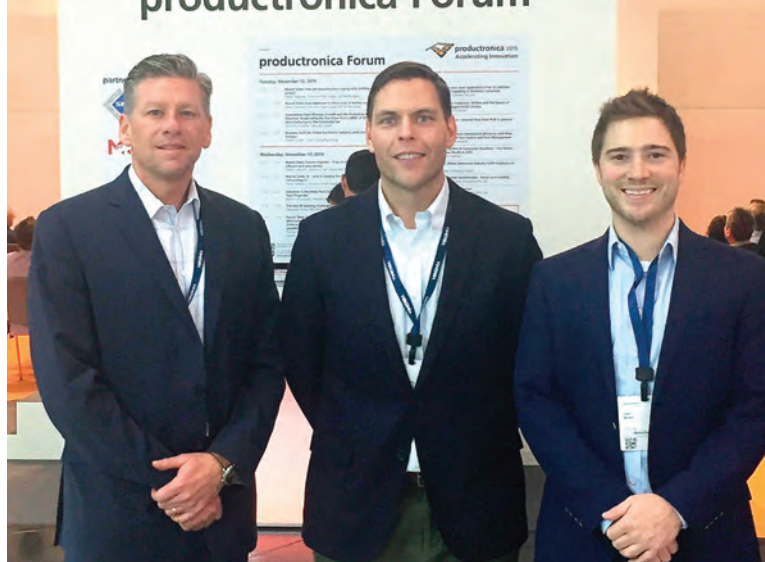
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DEVELOPMENT, CONTINUED

included in the portion of the document entitled 'Our Role.' "We propose a distribution of responsibilities – rather than geography – between NETWORKS and NeTREP. NeTREP will work with current tourism-focused organizations and efforts, such as NETTA, the region's chambers, and CVBs, on natural asset development and promotion and events to attract tourists to the region. While NETWORKS will continue to play an active supporting role in the TalentConnect program created and executed by NeTREP, we believe that NeTREP should maintain management of that and other people attraction programs.

"Meanwhile, NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership will remain in existence as owners and managers of current and potentially (even likely) future industrial properties jointly owned by our partners. The existing partnership and the Board of Directors will remain intact. However, a new organization – to be established as a public-private, not-for-profit EDO – will be created to continue the operational functions of NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership, but expanded to include Johnson City and Washington County, TN, as well as any of the other six counties and the cities therein that make up the Northeast Tennessee region as defined by the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD). The new organization will be named NETWORKS Economic Partnership in order to continue the momentum, reputation, and relationships of the current organization."



Ben White (Assistant Director for Chesapeake Economic Development), Will Payne (Managing Partner of Coalfield Strategies) and John Wood (Business Development Manager for VEDP's Europe Office)

PHOTO COURTESY INVEST SWVA

The Blue-Ribbon Task Force

Just hours after the NETWORKS executive committee meeting Nov. 13 in Blountville, the Mayors' Blue-Ribbon Task Force convened at the Jonesborough Visitors Center. The heads of the task force's five workgroups presented preliminary reports to the First Tennessee Development District Board, which is made up of the mayors and county mayors from Northeast Tennessee.

The meeting began with an olive branch from the private sector companies that had hosted the Regional Economic Development Forum in September. Mark Fuller, CEO of ROSC Global, the consulting

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firm that has been studying economic development in the region for almost two years, gave a presentation directly to the mayors. The private sector firms had been criticized for failing to invite county and municipal government leaders to the forum.

After Fuller's presentation, the heads of the workgroups updated the FTDD board on their findings in the areas of Entrepreneurial Development, Existing Business Development, Primary Job Attraction, Regional Tourism Promotion and Workforce Excellence. Mayors Grandy and Venable had tasked a few dozen government and business leaders from throughout Northeast Tennessee to conduct non-parochial investigations into what efforts in those areas would benefit from a regional approach.

The preliminary results have not been made public, but both mayors said another meeting of the FTDD board is being scheduled, after which that publication may occur.

Southwest Virginia meets Western Europe

Invest SWVa continues to make a splash representing Southwest Virginia's economic interests in new ways. Will Payne, Invest SWVa project leader spent 10 days in November along with representatives of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's (VEDP's) Europe office meeting with prospects in Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

"Our mission is to business investment opportunities in SWVA, and foreign direct investment is a critical piece of that," Payne said upon his return to Virginia. "This was our way of kicking off those efforts."

The first stop for Payne was Munich, where he pitched Virginia in general and Southwest Va., when appropriate to about three dozen companies at the Productronica and SEMICON trade shows.

"For these trips, you're partnering with VEDP," Payne said. "When you're meeting with a prospect, you're selling Virginia first and foremost. It's very much an educational experience for both parties. But then you also have the opportunity to showcase your region."

"A significant outcome of this trip was the personal relationship I was able to build with VEDP Europe's managing director, Anjete Abshoff as well as her colleagues John Wood and Claudia Herleb," Payne said. "In fact, I think we built a very strong foundation for SWVA. They all better

understand the region's challenges and, more importantly, its advantages and opportunities. They are very excited to work with us moving forward."

Payne shared key talking points with the VEDP contingent, which they can now use to help market the region. For instance, "When you're at the Cumberland Gap, you're closer to nine other state capitals than you are to Richmond. That is a key advantage for SWVA. The region's strategic location means companies with regional or nationwide distribution have easier access to their customers, and we have the building stock and infrastructure these companies desire."

The companies Payne and his VEDP compatriots were pitching were companies the Europe office had identified as likely to consider foreign direct investment in the U.S., Payne said.

In addition to meeting with prospects at the trade shows in Germany, Payne met with a specific company in Switzerland.

"We set three goals for this trip," Payne said. "First, we wanted to kick off our foreign direct investment campaign. Second, we wanted to build relationships with the VEDP Europe office. Third, we wanted to come home with opportunities in hand. We accomplished our mission. Now the exciting work begins." **B**



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BJ | Features

Crown Laboratories cuts ribbon at new corporate headquarters

by Scott Roberston



Crown Laboratories CEO Jeff Bedard
PHOTOS BY SCOTT ROBERSTON



Cutting the ribbon: (L-R) Washington County Mayor Joe Grandy, Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership Chair Will Barrett, Bedard, Tennessee Commissioner of Economic and Community Development Bobby Rolfe and Johnson City Mayor Jenny Brock.

Crown Laboratories CEO Jeff Bedard cut the ribbon on Crown's new corporate headquarters in Johnson City Nov. 25. The global skincare products manufacturer plans to create an additional 200+ jobs and invest \$27 million in its Johnson City operations by 2024.

The company – which partnered with private equity firm Hildred Capital Partners in late 2017 – last year became one of just 6 percent of companies to spend six consecutive years on Inc. Magazine's "Inc. 5000" list of the nation's fastest-growing private companies.

"Bringing new jobs to the region by adding profitable revenue aligns with our long-standing commitment to our employees, the community and Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, the Appalachian Highlands," Crown CEO Jeff Bedard said.

The region's quality of life will be a key drawing point as Crown recruits new employees, Bedard said. "We have so much to offer that many people throughout this great country have no idea how wonderful a place it is to live here, to be outdoors, and to educate and raise your family."

Crown expects nearly half its anticipated employment growth to be corporate jobs, with a resulting local payroll addition of more than \$15 million.

Said Tennessee Commissioner of Economic and Community Development (ECD) Bobby

Rolfe, "when a company decides to put their headquarters in your community, it's an enormous win, and I say that because it's the headquarters, it's the C-suite, it's those men and women that invest in the community."

Crown, best known for its Blue Lizard Australian Sunscreen line, has acquired several companies and product lines since late 2017 and grown organically, as well as picking up two additional equity partners. In a year's time, it acquired six products from GlaxoSmithKline, including legacy brand Keri.

Crown received an incentive from the Tennessee ECD, though the department has yet to announce the amount of that incentive. The company also agreed to a payment-in-lieu of taxes (PILOT) plan with the local industrial development board (IDB). Crown will lease the headquarters building, formerly home to NN Inc's corporate headquarters, from the IDB for \$1 a year. The PILOT incentive, currently worth about \$113,000 annually, lasts through 2029, after which Crown will assume ownership and standard property tax liability. Job creation and wage requirements take effect beginning with the 2025 tax year.

"Putting a crown on top of this building is just perfect," Johnson City Mayor Jenny Brock said. "We are pleased to be of assistance to your board as it positions Crown for the future." ■

Johnson City marks 150th anniversary with an eye toward the future

by Dave Ongie

During a gathering in King Commons last Sunday afternoon to mark the 150th anniversary of Johnson City receiving its charter, Howard S. Carman Jr. offered a poem to mark the milestone.

In that poem was a line that summed up the birth of Johnson City quite succinctly: “Three new railway lines converged, and Johnson’s Depot boomed when trains arrived.”

Like so many other cities, Johnson City boomed when folks seized on the opportunities presented by the arrival of the railroad industry. The depot drew people. Businesses, schools and churches sprung up to provide for their needs, and homes were built to shelter them.

“This city is one built on ingenuity, fortitude, vision, entrepreneurship and a lot of hard work,” said Pete Peterson, City Manager of Johnson City.

Johnson City Mayor Jenny Brock noted that Johnson City has four milestones in its history. The founding in 1869, the 50th anniversary in 1919, the centennial celebration of 1969 and this year’s Sesquicentennial celebration. At each milestone, city leaders have been able to tout population growth.

The challenge is to continue that trend into the future, and

Peterson touted the city’s efforts to improve the quality of life in Johnson City through projects like the Tweetsie Trail, Tannery Knobs Bike Park and the green spaces downtown.

As Johnson City Vice Mayor Joe Wise prepared to put a report in the time capsule that will be opened in 2069, he reflected on the work ahead for the city’s leaders.

“This will be read by those with the benefit of hindsight,” Wise said. “So let that be a challenge to us all.”



Joe Wise

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ON THE MOVE

The Eastman Credit Union Board of Directors elected **E. Wayne Kirk** to serve as chairman at the October meeting. As a certified public accountant and certified valuation analyst, Kirk brings 45 years of accounting and management experience to the board. He is a partner in Trinity Valuation Consulting Group, a leading financial services consulting group, located in Johnson City. Trinity serves as a resource center for the financial and legal communities with clients in the United States and abroad. Prior to Trinity, Kirk was the co-founder of Kirk & Fortner, CPAs.


Kirk, who has served on ECU's board of directors for 15 years, has also served as chairman of the Audit Committee and Finance Committee. In addition, Kirk was the board treasurer prior to his appointment as the vice chair in 2014, a position that he has held for the last five years.

Kirk served in various leadership roles within the Wellmont Health System for more than 30 years including chairman of the board. Kirk is a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), Tennessee Society of Certified Public Accountants (TSCPA), and the National Association of Certified Valuation Analysts (NACVA).

Apart from his career, Kirk has a passion for staying engaged in the lives of the next generation. He is very active in his church and finds it a blessing to share in the journey of tomorrow's leaders.

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Holston Valley named a 50 Top Cardiovascular Hospital
Kingsport's Holston Valley Medical Center has been named one of the nation's 50 Top Cardiovascular Hospitals by IBM Watson Health – and it is the only hospital in Tennessee to achieve the honor. This is the fifth time Holston Valley has earned a place on the list. The study evaluates 989 hospitals in the United States and spotlights the top-performing facilities, basing its results on a balanced scorecard of publicly available clinical, operational and patient satisfaction metrics and data.

"This recognition is not only an incredible accomplishment for our physicians and team members, but it is also a huge win for our community," said Lindy White, president of Ballad Health's Northwest Market, which includes Holston Valley. "When patients come to Holston Valley in need of cardiac care, they can trust they are being cared for by a team recognized as one of our nation's best." The study is part of the IBM Watson Health 100 Top Hospitals program, analyzing hospital and health system performance in key clinical and operational areas for selected cardiovascular procedures and medical care. Indicators include: risk-adjusted inpatient mortality index, risk-adjusted complications index, mean 30-day risk-adjusted mortality rate, mean 30-day risk-adjusted readmission rate, severity-adjusted length of stay, case mix and wage-adjusted inpatient cost per case, 30-day episode payment and adjusted operating profit margin. The study has been conducted annually since 1998. 



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Doubling Down on Skyrocketing Costs of College

by Phil Roe

Growing up, my father worked in a factory and my mother worked as a bank teller. I lived at home while attending Austin Peay State University before enrolling in medical school at the University of Tennessee. After graduating – and serving our country in the U.S. Army – I was able to use my G.I. Bill benefits to pay for a portion of my medical school education. Because of this benefit, I never had to take out student loans, giving me the ability to graduate college without debt. As I reflect back, I think what a tremendous advantage it was to start out without a crippling debt burden.



Unfortunately, this is increasingly uncommon among students who pursue higher education. The cost of college is increasing at an unsustainable rate. Over 40 million Americans have accumulated over \$1.5 trillion in student loan debt. The average tuition at public four-year institutions has risen from \$3,190 in 1988 to \$9,970 in 2018, while the average tuition at private four-year non-profits has risen from \$15,160 in 1988 to \$34,740 in 2018.

We all agree student loan debt and the cost of education are out of control and must be addressed. In October, rather than putting forward reforms that address the skyrocketing cost of education, House Education and Labor Committee Democrats put forth the College Affordability Act (CAA) which will likely further increase the cost of higher education. Seventy percent of taxpayers have no postsecondary degree and won't benefit from this legislation, but they will foot a portion of this bill's \$400 billion cost.

At a time when America is facing a labor shortage of around 7.6 million workers, the CAA fails to address the skills gap and connect our education system with the needs of employers. Nationally, as many as 35 percent of small businesses are unable to find qualified applicants for open positions, and East Tennessee is no different. There are good-paying jobs in areas that do not require a bachelor's degree, and Congress should be encouraging states to innovate with their higher education funding. Tennessee is a leader in this area through

the Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect. Tennessee Promise gives high school graduates two years of tuition-free community or technical college and Tennessee Reconnect provides free education for adults looking to be retrained and receive an associate degree or a degree from a technical college. These programs work for Tennessee, and encouraging state flexibility will allow other states to find models that work for students in their states.

One of the most significant drawbacks of the CAA is that it will do nothing to address the regulatory burdens colleges face, which studies show is a significant driver of college cost increases. According to a 2015 Vanderbilt University study, schools already spend about 11 percent of their budget, and 15 percent of faculty time, on federal regulation compliance. This same study estimated the U.S. higher education system spends \$27 billion annually to comply with these regulations. Every dollar spent on compliance is one added to tuition, not spent on students. That's why I introduced an amendment to prohibit this bill from going into effect unless studies show it will not increase the cost of attendance for students. The fact that committee Democrats unanimously voted my amendment down shows their lack of confidence this bill will lower costs.

Another significant issue on college campuses these days is the battle over free speech on college campuses. Colleges were once hotbeds of free speech and debate, and this right is guaranteed by the First Amendment. Disturbingly, around 10 percent of American colleges now restrict constitutionally-protected free speech to a particular corner of campus, and about 30 percent of colleges have restrictive speech codes. I believe colleges and universities should be places that foster free and open exchange of ideas. To encourage this, I introduced an amendment that simply requires schools to be transparent about any speech codes or policies they have in place that restricts this fundamental American right – nothing more. Even something this non-controversial was defeated by the majority.

We need a 21st Century education system that helps students succeed in the global economy and puts hardworking Americans on the path to success. We need to reduce the cost of college and better align education with the needs of employers, so the CAA was a missed opportunity. I'm committed to continuing to find solutions because it's too important to our future success as a country.

Dr. Phil Roe is the United States Congressman representing Tennessee's First Congressional District.



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