

The Business Journal

of Tri-Cities Tennessee / Virginia

bjournal.com

Outdoor Recreation:

Tourism and talent development's common tool

Plus
Winter Innovations
and
Bristol Chamber Board
goes to Greenville

Kayla Carter and Meredith Muse ride the trails at Tannery Knobs

PRSR:STD
US Postage
PAID
Johnson City, TN
Permit 3

MARCH 2020
\$3.00 Volume 32 Number 5





\$1,000 CAN DO A LOT FOR YOUR BUSINESS. SO CAN THE RIGHT BANK.

Let's face it, the cost of operating your business adds up. We're here to help, by offering up to **\$1000*** to new customers who open a business checking account. With our dedicated team ready to help you switch your accounts, we make your on-boarding experience as simple as possible. That's our promise to you—Solutions Made Simple.

Visit our website for more information. BankofTennessee.com/TriCitiesBonus



SOLUTIONS MADE SIMPLE.

*Minimum to open is only \$100. New money only. You may choose from any of our business checking accounts. Customer is eligible to receive \$250.00 for each completed requirement of the promotional offer not to exceed \$1000.00. Customer must complete all promotional requirements within 90 days of account opening. Limited time offer.

You're Invited To Attend eChemExpo 2020!

Admission is FREE to industry professionals. Register now at: echemexpo.com/to-attend

eChemExpo



— YEARS —

NEW HORIZONS

APRIL 15-16TH KINGSPORT, TN

MEADOWVIEW CONVENTION CENTER

NEW HORIZONS: Safely Innovate, Optimize and Grow!

eChemExpo is the #1 multidisciplinary applied innovation event for the process industries. 200 exhibitors, more than 60 seminars, 2 groundbreaking panel discussions, and 2 featured sessions happen over just 1 1/2-days. Mix and match any of the 25-minute seminars or 50 minute panels to earn up to 9 hours of PDH credit from eight niche-specific seminar tracks. Learn more at: echemexpo.com

DAY 1 WED | APRIL 15 | SEMINARS ONLY

1. EQUIPMENT AND INSTRUMENTATION
2. PROCESS, MECHANICAL, SAFETY, ENVIRONMENT
3. OPTIMIZATION, DIGITAL, MOBILITY, SAFETY

DAY 2 THUR | APRIL 16 | EXPO OPENS & SEMINARS

4. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES
5. SAFETY, SUSTAINABILITY, MOBILITY, ENVIRONMENT
6. ENGINEERING, CONSTRUCTION, LIFE CYCLE OPTIMIZATION
7. PROCESS, MECHANICAL, MODELING
8. OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE, SAFETY, CYBER-SECURITY

ATTENDEE TRACKS

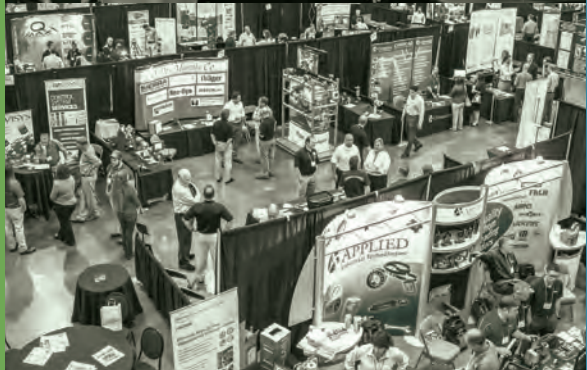


Table of Contents | March 2020



| ON THE COVER

Outdoor Recreation

Whether it be for tourism or talent attraction, the great outdoors offers the region a unique economic development tool.



COVER PHOTO BY EARL NEIKIRK,
NEIKIRK PHOTOGRAPHY



| FEATURES

14 When Bristol went to Greenville

The Chamber Board from a city that does a lot with a little visited a city that has turned a little into a lot.

18 Jarden Zinc is dead, long live ARTAZN

What had once been Alltrista and was more recently Jarden Zinc has rebranded again.

20 Winter Innovations scores funding from ART, Ballad

The Angel Roundtable's first hometown firm makes good story

22 Entrepreneur Summit

Fresh off its own rebranding FoundersForge provides an update on broadband infrastructure

23 New title, same enthusiasm for talent development

The Mayors' Blue-Ribbon Task Force issues its reports on regional economic development.

24 Hangar's On

The on-again off-again Northeast State hangar project at the TRI is on again

27 ApprenticeshipTN

A new statewide program in Tennessee will look pretty familiar to some in the northeast.

| DEPARTMENTS

7	From the Editor
8	Guest Column
9	Trends

28	Awards & Achievements
30	The Last Word

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 Coordinator

Robin Williams
rwilliams@bjournal.com
423.794.6938

Creative

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



Subscription per year \$25.

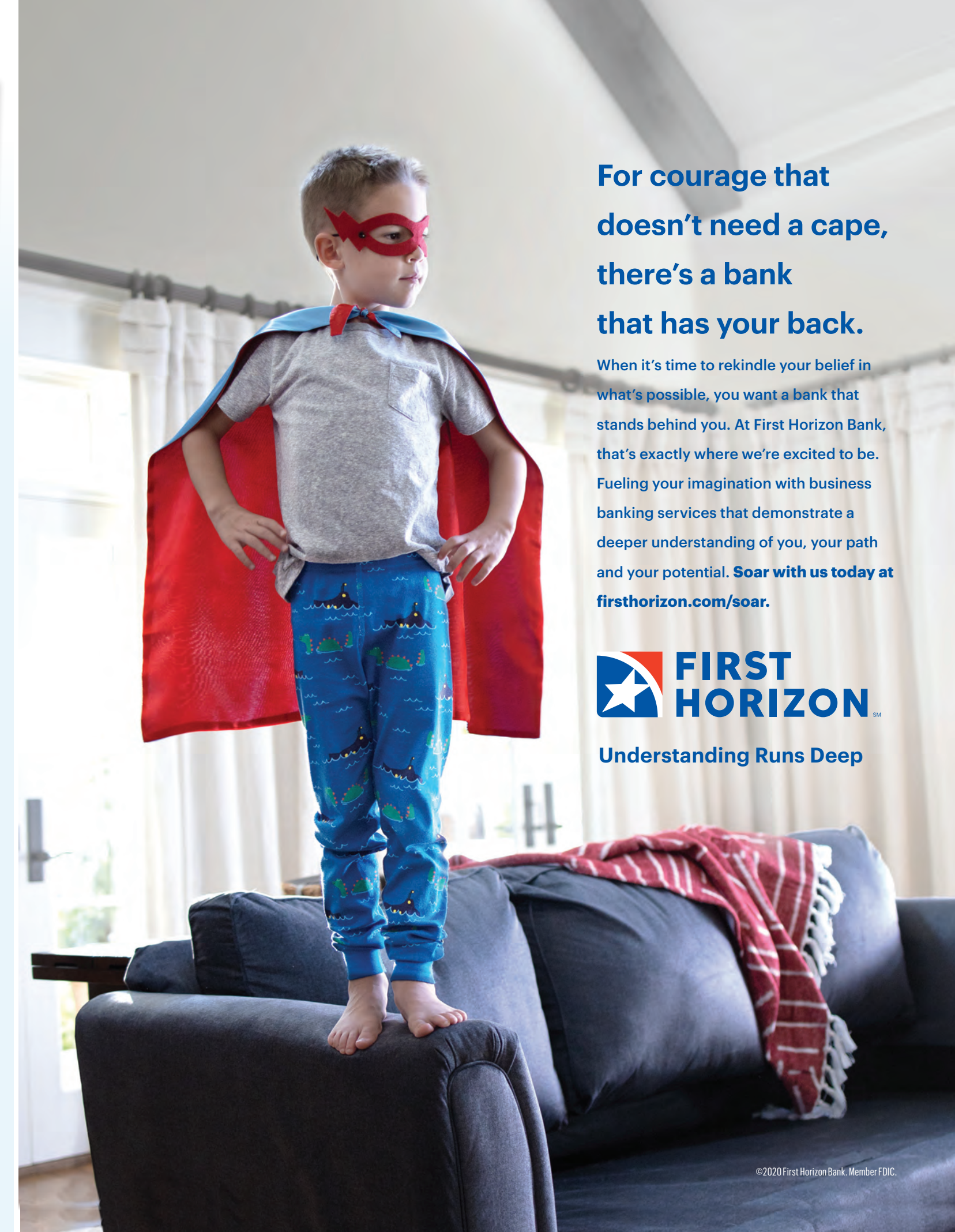


The Business Journal of
Tri-Cities Tennessee/Virginia

is published monthly by
Derby Publishing, LLC
PO Box 5006

Johnson City, TN 37602
Phone: 423.854.0140

©2020



**For courage that
doesn't need a cape,
there's a bank
that has your back.**

When it's time to rekindle your belief in what's possible, you want a bank that stands behind you. At First Horizon Bank, that's exactly where we're excited to be. Fueling your imagination with business banking services that demonstrate a deeper understanding of you, your path and your potential. **Soar with us today at firsthorizon.com/soar.**



Understanding Runs Deep

NOMINATIONS ARE NOW OPEN!



Healthcare The Business Journal HEROES of Tri Cities Tennessee / Virginia

The 28th annual recognition of the extraordinary individuals and organizations that go above and beyond the call of duty every day.

Healthcare Heroes are the men and women who go above and beyond the call of duty everyday. For more than 27 years, *The Business Journal of Tri-Cities, TN/VA* has honored these heroes on behalf of the business community they serve. Without healthy employees and customers, business cannot survive. Healthcare Heroes keep our region's people and businesses well cared for.

To nominate an individual or organization today, email news@bjournal.com or mail to P.O. Box 5006, Johnson City, TN 37602 with a letter of recommendation telling what makes them a Healthcare Hero. Deadline for nominations is the close of business on May 31.

In addition to recognizing general Healthcare Heroes, five special Cup of Kindness® Awards will be presented from the following categories:

Innovation Award

To a provider whose inventive thinking furthered the delivery of care.

Community Service Award

To an individual or organization for excellence in public health.

Distinguished Service Award

To a provider who has shown leadership and excellent service over a sustained period of time.

Meritorious Service Award

To an individual who has shown excellence in administration.

Support Service Award

To a provider for outstanding assistance in the field of health care.

The 2020 Healthcare Heroes Luncheon will be held Friday, July 31 at the Carnegie Hotel in Johnson City.

My version of a Coronavirus panic – or – Why it would have been great if the president could have signed a trade deal while he was in India



When President Trump addressed the nation at an emergency press conference regarding the Covid-19 (or Coronavirus) outbreak in late February, he said, “There’s a very good chance you’re not going to die.” As comforting as those words may be, for the sake of accuracy, he could have added, “But there’s also a pretty good chance that the economy will be a little green around the gills for a while.”

As of this writing (Feb. 28), the Coronavirus reactions of the president, his political opponents, the media, and the consumers of all things newsy have been predictable, if lamentable. The president tried to buoy the American economy by saying the stock market looked good as it tumbled 1,000 points in a day. His political opponents took that opportunity to bash him for being self-serving, which ironically was an immensely self-serving thing for them to do. Some in the media bashed the president for concentrating on the markets instead of the human cost, while others rushed to forecast an economic downturn based on consumer and investor fears of a potential world-wide catastrophe. Media consumers meanwhile kept selling off their stocks and going on Amazon to look for deals on reusable surgical masks.

Of course, it is absolutely correct for the president to try to calm fears, both in the markets and in the general populace. And, it is the second nature of large populations of people to be panicky about things that look threatening to large populations of people.

But I fear an economic downturn that Covid-19 could drive without causing a single new case outside the boundaries of one non-US country.

I understand that the flashy international stories today involve tourism taking a hit in Italy, and Kim-Jung Un having a great new reason to stay out of South Korea, and Iranian government officials continuing to cough their way through televised appearances in which they tell their dying country-men everything is fine.

I just have a hard time getting past a fear that even if nobody outside of China is stricken ill from this day forward, the world economy is still about to be severely under the weather. And that forecast has nothing to do with consumer or investor confidence or a world-wide pandemic. It has everything to do with how business in a global economy gets done.

More than 2,700 Chinese citizens have died from Coronavirus. For a country with a population of around a-billion-and-a-half, that’s hardly a drop in the bucket. But China isn’t dismissing it as a bout of the flu. My fear is that we are very likely to see, in short order and in stark terms, that too much of the world’s gross product depends on China as part of its supply chain.

The healthiest American consumer can’t buy a product that’s not been produced because its components are sitting on the floor of an idled Chinese factory. And that’s just the tip of the iceberg. China doesn’t just handle consumer goods. Factories in that country make parts that are shipped out to be used in the manufacture of goods around the world. It’s part of what makes trade deals so hard to nail down. An American-made item might still have Chinese-produced parts.

So, manufacturers the world over are scrambling to find alternative production venues to the Chinese plants that have supplied them, but doing so is expensive. It will have an effect of profitability.

Whether you believe the virus will become the Thanos pandemic that kills off half the world’s population or you believe Covid-19 will become nothing more than a more geographically diverse version of South America’s Zika and Toronto’s Sars, pay attention to the effects of the virus on China’s manufacturing capacity and to the industrial world’s ability to replace that capacity if it continues to dip.

I fear that if China can’t quickly reverse the rapid spread of the virus within its borders, to paraphrase a CDC official, it’s not if the effects of the Chinese Coronavirus will begin negatively affecting the American economy, it’s when.

Four Reasons the 2020 Census Matters for Tennessee

by Bryce Tuggle

The 2020 census and subsequent annual estimates based on it will be used to allocate taxpayer resources, redraw legislative districts, and inform countless policy decisions over the next decade. Here are four specific examples of why that matters to you and your business.



1. A lot of federal spending in Tennessee depends on census data — including over \$29.6 billion in FY2017. Census data affect how the federal government allocates more than \$1.5 trillion through 300+ programs. A detailed breakdown of federal FY 2017 spending in Tennessee is not yet available. However, data from FY 2016 show just 55 of those programs accounted for nearly \$17 billion in federal funds flowing to Tennessee — including individuals, state and local governments, and Tennessee-based businesses, nonprofits, and organizations. The largest of these programs are Medicare and Medicaid/TennCare — the biggest expenses and top sources of federal dollars in the state budget. The share of TennCare's costs paid by the federal government depends largely on annual, census-based estimates of population and income. An accurate census count ensures that Tennessee receives its intended share of federal dollars. For example, the 2010 census undercounted people in Tennessee by an estimated 0.12 percent — costing the state approximately \$7.7 million across just five federally-funded programs in FY 2015

2. Census data affect Tennesseans' voice in federal, state, and local government. Every 10 years, we use census data to update district maps for Congress, the Tennessee General Assembly, and many city and county legislatures. Within-state population shifts typically result in new district boundaries for the U.S. House of Representatives, the state Senate, and the state House. Tennessee is one of 27 states that tasks its state legislature to draw these new boundaries every decade. Local governments in Tennessee also use the census to draw district boundaries for their governing bodies. The census determines how many votes Tennessee has in Congress and the Electoral College. Tennessee currently has nine U.S.

House seats and 11 electoral votes for president. The 2020 census is not expected to change those numbers. Regardless of population, every state has two U.S. senators.

3. Tennessee uses census data to calculate how much state tax revenue goes to local governments. The state shares over \$1.2 billion in tax revenue with local governments each year, much of it based on population. These state-shared taxes are an important funding source for county and municipal governments. For example, Tennessee distributed \$378 million in gas and fuel taxes to local governments in FY 2018 for roads and highways. Each city or town's share of that money depended on its population, while population and land area combined determined half of each county's portion.

4. The census helps policymakers and organizations use their limited time and resources to serve Tennesseans more effectively. Policymakers often rely on census data to understand their communities, set priorities, and craft policy. Governments at all levels use census data to inform how and where to spend their limited time and funding. For example, insights into local populations and characteristics can help to prioritize public dollars between schools, fire departments, roads, and green spaces. A wide array of organizations and individuals outside of government also use census data for research and decision-making. Researchers, for example, rely on accurate data to understand issues and test solutions. Likewise, businesses and nonprofits use census data to research where to invest their time and resources. Knowing who lives where allows us to more accurately estimate things like market size, labor pools, and local needs and preferences.

The 2020 census will have huge effects on Tennessee in the coming decade — both direct and indirect. It affects our political representation at every level of government, how much taxpayer money flows where, and the ability of public and private sector actors to make well-informed decisions based on evidence and data. To this end, the governor's office and many local governments are partnering with the Census Bureau to ensure that an accurate count is taken in Tennessee. To learn more about the importance of an accurate census and your role in it, visit 2020census.gov.

**This brief was updated on Feb. 21, 2020 to add new information about FY 2017 federal funding. Bryce Tuggle is a policy analyst for the Sycamore Institute, an independent, nonpartisan public policy research center for Tennessee.*

January home sales post double-digit gains

The regional housing market started 2020 the same way it ended 2019 – with a bang.

January resales were up 16.5 percent, and there was a tidy 3.3 percent sales price appreciation. There was even an increase in active listings. It has been so long since the active listing count has been positive; even a small increase is good news.

While increasing sales and prices are good news, there is no way around the fact that we do not have balanced market conditions. There are several descriptions for balanced market conditions. The most common is about six months of inventory.

Townhome and condominium resales outperformed January's single-family detached market with a 50 percent increase in closings. 2020 will likely see more activity in this subsector. Increasing demand and less inventory have pushed prices for single-family detached homes beyond the affordability range for many buyers. That puts townhomes and condos in the spotlight. Last year there were almost 600 townhome/condo resales – up 5.6 percent from the previous year. The average sales price of \$133,628 was a

5.1 percent annual increase.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) rules for townhome/condo loans were also sweetened to make them more attractive to first-time buyers. The market is absorbing townhome/condos at a faster rate. Last month the average days on the market for a townhome/condo resale were 89 days compared to 121 for single-family detached resales.

Another plus for the market is momentum in the new home market is picking up. That is welcome news on several fronts. Unlike the existing home market, the new home sector has seen only slow growth. For example, in 2018, there were more flip sales than new home sales. Locally and nationwide, there is an acknowledgment that part of the challenge facing housing today is the lack of new home construction during the early years of the recovery. Until now, new home construction has been at about half of its pre-recession capacity. That will likely pick up this year. More new homes will help increase existing home inventory as some buyers trade up and others scale down.

SINGLE-FAMILY COUNTY MARKETS

County	Jan. Closings	Yy ch	Yy % ch	County	YTD Closings	YTD ch	YTD % ch
Sullivan	124	-6	4.6%	Sullivan	124	-6	4.6%
Washington, TN	117	5	4.5%	Washington, TN	117	5	4.5%
Hawkins	46	22	91.7%	Hawkins	46	22	91.7%
Carter	39	12	44.4%	Carter	39	12	44.4%
Greene	36	3	9.1%	Greene	36	6	9.1%
Washington, VA	35	9	34.6%	Washington, VA	35	9	34.6%
Wise	17	1	6.3%	Wise	17	1	6.3%
Johnson	9	-3	25.0%	Johnson	9	-3	25.0%
Scott	7	0	0.0%	Scott	7	0	0.0%
Lee	6	6	100.0%	Lee	6	6	100.0%
County	Jan. avg. price	Yy ch	Yy % ch	County	YTD avg. price	YTD ch	YTD % ch
Washington, TN	\$241,693	\$29,704	14.0%	Washington, TN	\$241,693	\$29,704	14.0%
Johnson	\$189,911	-\$67,672	-26.0%	Johnson	\$189,911	-\$67,672	-26.0%
Sullivan	\$179,469	\$2,113	1.2%	Sullivan	\$179,469	\$2,113	1.2%
Hawkins	\$158,535	-\$1,348	-0.8%	Hawkins	\$158,535	-\$1,348	-0.8%
Washington, VA	\$158,130	\$49,057	45.0%	Washington, VA	\$158,130	\$49,057	45.0%
Carter	\$156,111	-\$7,448	-4.6%	Carter	\$156,111	-\$7,448	-4.6%
Greene	\$155,119	\$8,978	6.1%	Greene	\$155,119	\$8,978	6.1%
Wise	\$117,582	\$28,257	31.6%	Wise	\$117,582	\$28,257	31.6%
Scott	\$71,357	-\$8,007	-10.1%	Scott	\$71,357	-\$8,007	-10.1%
Lee	\$62,983	\$62,983	100.0%	Lee	\$62,983	\$62,983	100.0%

GLOBAL COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE SERVICES



Jerry Petzoldt Agency, LLC

Each office independently owned and operated

Search Over 750 Properties
www.tcigroup.com

Kingsport 423.230.0255
Johnson City 423.915.0911



Jerry Petzoldt
Development
423.677.2486



Gary Sproles
Investment
423.612.0617



Jackie Hewitt
Buyer Representative
423.292.1000



Cassie Petzoldt
General Business
423.677.2344



Glenn Perkins
Net Leased Investment
423.956.5707



Kelsey Quillin
Leasing Specialist
423.948.1743



Lynn Shipley
Professional
423.612.4905



Shea Sproles
Corporate
423.612.2646



David Johnson
Financial
423.765.3636



Brenda Clarke
Site Selection
423.737.0911

**ATTENTION INVESTORS –
NEW 10 YEAR LEASE!**



406 E. Main Blvd, Church Hill



Outdoor Recreation:

Playing to natural strengths to address areas where the region's economy can improve

by Scott Robertson

The first question every site selection consultant or business executive looking at locating in a region asks is about that region's workforce. In Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, it's an area of concern. Yet a key to addressing the problem of talent attraction and retention may have been staring us all in the face for years. The great outdoors, which some economic developers have in the past seen as a negative, is rapidly becoming a usable economic development tool.

The current generation of 20-somethings and 30-somethings this region is dying to attract has, as a demographic, a strong desire to live and work in areas with outdoor recreation opportunities. Yet, says Mitch Miller, CEO of the Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership (NeTREP), the young people who are already here aren't even aware of the opportunities the region offers.

"We need the next generation to stay here," Miller says. "We're already losing them now. They're going to be vital to us in the next 20 to 30 years. So, I think we are going to have to do what (Eastman CEO) Mark Costa says and be radical and do some things much differently because what we have been doing is not working."

To that end, NeTREP has formed a task force including regional bankers, businesspeople and tourism groups to define and help implement a strategic approach to utilization of outdoor recreation opportunities to improve the regional economy. There's a strong argument for buy-in from all sectors, says Alicia Phelps, executive director of the Northeast Tennessee Tourism Alliance. "When a community invests and is interested in outdoor recreation, they're going to have people move to the area and they will see an uptick in businesses starting up," Phelps says. "It just makes everything mesh well together when you can go be in the outdoors and have fun."

It's not surprising to hear a tourism official touting outdoor recreation. What's perhaps more important is to hear the same words coming from a 20-something through-hiker and mountain bike enthusiast who's made this region her home. Kayla Carter is outdoor development manager for NeTREP.

"Outdoor recreation isn't just tourism," Carter says. "When we look at outdoor recreation, it is its own industry and economy. So yes, it does drive tourism as people come here for mountain bike trails and things like that, but outdoor recreation

also drives health. It drives transportation. It's beneficial to manufacturing. It's quality of life.

"This is something our region can leverage moving forward," Carter says. "Our God-made natural environment is right here. We could be tapping into it, and that just makes so much sense." All that having been said, NeTREP is advocating for, and implementing, a deliberate and patient approach to harnessing that economy. The organization has already tried a high-profile attempt to bring young professionals to the region that Miller says he now sees had short-comings from which he's learned. TalentConnect was a program that brought college students from outside the region here to meet with potential employers. "TalentConnect has generated some positives," Miller says, "but there have not been the results I wanted and expected. I should have tested it better first. So, before we jump in to do these outdoor initiatives, let's get the right people around the table to understand how each of these ecosystems come together."

To that end, the outdoor task force has sent out a survey of the eight counties of Northeast Tennessee as a jumping-off point (netrepsurvey.org/open). "The survey's basic purpose is to collect data to build this story around outdoor recreation as an actual economy and industry, not just to lump it in with tourism," Carter says. "The data we collect will show what kind of people are using the various assets, and what are they looking for. We want to know where they're going. Is it the big, well-known hot spots in the area? Is it the Appalachian Trail? Is it more out-of-the-way places? Is it greenways? What do people want to see and do?"

"Then we really want the community to help guide the outdoor development program where it needs to go," Carter says. "We're not going to be able to accomplish any strategic initiative or meet any goal without the communities being behind what we're doing. So, getting community feedback will help guide the initiatives. I have people coming at me from all directions saying, 'Can you help me here? What can you do there?' I would really like to have a good set definition of the areas and priorities on which we need to focus. When we have priorities in each area, we can figure out what it makes best sense to support with our capacity."

Taking a data-driven approach should help the effort avoid

SEE RECREATION, 12



Kayla Carter at Tannery Knobs
PHOTOS BY EARL NEIKIRK



Kayla Carter and Meredith Muse

RECREATION, CONTINUED

the setbacks that hampered TalentConnect and other efforts over the years, Miller says. “We need to be testing some of this stuff before we just throw it out there. As economic developers, we get stuck in this rut of produce-produce-produce-gotta-move-the-economy-right-now. I think we need to be a little more patient in terms of testing ideas to make sure we have the right product on the table to better this region.

“Instead of just coming up with initiatives, we need to think about the people we serve and the impact we can have for them. Instead of just thinking ‘We already have the answer, so let’s just implement this idea and it’s going to work,’ we need to look at the impact of what we’re doing on people’s lives.”

The survey mainly contemplates demographics and spending data. Phase II will look at the actual economic impact of the outdoor recreation economy and industry in the region and getting baseline measurements. From there the task force will look at what efforts might best help grow the outdoor economy.

“I’m hoping to have Phase I wrapped up in the late spring or early summer,” Carter says. “The analysis portion is Phase II. We used to have marketing as Phase II, but we realized we really needed to have a full understanding of the outdoor recreation economy before we brand it and label it and try to sell it.

“We first sent the survey out as a random-sampling direct mail piece into the eight counties of the First Tennessee Development District,” Carter says. “We see future

partnership with the development district. From that we have gotten around 175 responses. All that data will be kept unmanipulated in its own category. Then we opened it up online and have more than double the number of people who have responded.”

Says Miller, “We’re going to get a lot of good information. But what’s the problem you’re trying to solve with that information? I think we can uncover effective long-term initiatives if we can filter some of this information, for instance, into the entrepreneurship side. There may be opportunities for business start-ups in this outdoors space. And maybe it’s just a kayak shop, but maybe it’s working with Eastman to understand if there is an opportunity in advanced materials and all of a sudden, we have a brand-new concept right here in Northeast Tennessee.”

“With a regional supply chain,” Carter interjects.

“Without a doubt you can look at it from a workforce standpoint,” Miller says. “I’m just not aware that an outdoor recreation-related business network has been built, and I’m hopeful that this will get us to a point where a network can start to be built.”

Miller knows there will be doubters who prefer more conventional approaches to talent and tourism development, but says, “I think we need to be really strategic, and this applies to the entire region. We need to understand how to address our problems, but we need to be inclusive in that process, to not think that the same folks who have been doing this are going to come up with a different solution.” ■



At Lexus of Kingsport, we understand the complexities of buying a luxury automobile.

As part of your *Lexus of Kingsport* ownership experience, we offer many complimentary services: Lexus loaner vehicles, pick-up and delivery of your vehicle while in for service, and a well-appointed client lounge, just to name a few. And, while you are in for service, rest assured that your Lexus will be repaired by a Certified Lexus Technician, trained to work only on your vehicle.

Call or visit *Lexus of Kingsport* today to experience the finest luxury cars ever built.



2527 East Stone Drive | Kingsport, TN | 423-224-2270 | lexusofkingsport.com



Greenville Mayor Knox White addresses the Bristol Chamber Board of Directors.

When Bristol went to Greenville

Bristol Chamber Board picks the brains of the best and brightest in South Carolina's upstate

by Scott Robertson

The scene could easily have been State Street. Two dozen or so Bristolians walked briskly through cold morning air on wide sidewalks alongside a two-lane main thoroughfare. But on the morning of February 20, the scene was unfolding about 150 miles south of Bristol in Greenville, South Carolina, and the Bristolians weren't on their way to the Paramount or the Burger Bar. They were on a fact-finding mission in one of America's success-story cities.

"Every other year the Chamber board typically engages in a retreat focused on board engagement and strategic planning," explains Beth Rhinehart, CEO. "This year our Board Chair, Greg Neal (president of Ballad Health's northeast market) suggested that we travel to Greenville S.C., on an intercity visit.

"Our Bristol 2040 recently completed an implementation plan and we hoped to visit and learn what Greenville was doing and to meet with their leaders to hear how they had achieved success as a city and to also hear what their challenges had been and continue to be," Rhinehart says. "We wanted to meet with leaders to learn about their efforts in tourism, entrepreneurialism, workforce development, co-working ecosystems, chamber efforts and more."

Greenville has parlayed the tax base of a county of 500,000 (the combined CSA of Johnson City, Kingsport and Bristol has a similar population size to Greenville County) into a tourism mecca and desirable, though increasingly unaffordable, place to live. By way of comparison, the combined hotel occupancy in the Tri-Cities increased around 1 percent last year, with an average daily rate (ADR) increase of 1.2 percent. Between 2011 and 2018, Greenville's occupancy increased 15 percent despite a significant

increase in the number of rooms available, and the ADR increase over that period was 51 percent.

Bristol's question was simple: How do y'all do that?

The answer was more complicated.

First, Greenvillians bristle when the notion arises that the arrival of a BMW plant in 1994 was the sole driver of the community's success. "We've had Michelin headquarters for years," Greenville Mayor Knox White told the Bristol group over lunch at one of the first restaurants of the 120+ that now dot the downtown map. "We've had a good diversified manufacturing base, but the big picture is that we had very good leadership that was very intentional both in diversifying manufacturing and in downtown."

Downtown was one of the things that was of most interest to the Bristol Chamber group. In the early 1980s, Greenville's city government decided to reinvent downtown. Like most American cities at the time, the rise of suburban shopping malls had killed the downtown economy in Greenville. The department stores were all gone, replaced by bars of questionable repute and pawn shops.

When the city government announced a plan to bulldoze the existing four-lane Main Street to make room for wide sidewalks and a two-lane street, it was able to do so with little opposition because, as one city government official said, "there was nobody downtown left to complain."

The Hyatt hotel chain built a hotel and convention center at one end of Main Street. The city built a performing arts center midway down the street. Eventually, a minor league ballpark was built at the other end of the street. "We did some clever things," White told the Bristolians. "We took city owned parking lots and

put those out to be built as mixed-use projects. We also concentrated on building second-floor residential space in those projects. We knew we'd never build critical mass, whatever that is, unless we had people on the street after five and on weekends, and you can't do that without residential."

Even the minor league baseball stadium, Fluor Field, has a mixed-use development just past the outfield wall. It was a critical part of getting the stadium built. The city also tore down a highway bridge that passed over a waterfall along the Reedy River downtown and replaced it with a footbridge, opening a park around the falls.

The river had been polluted for many years during Greenville's run as the textile capital of the South, said Mary Douglas Hirsch, real estate development manager for the city. "With a clean-up effort and the building of the park, the river became an amenity."

As residents began moving back downtown, the city strived to create what Hirsch calls, "a sense of place. We wanted an interesting experience on every corner and a real pedestrian orientation to downtown."

By doing all those things, White said, the city "activated" its downtown. The only hiccup came when teens overran the park for a few weeks one summer, White said. A clever city staffer suggested having free bluegrass concerts in the park and the

teens were gone within a couple of weeks.

The city's success has been driven by its willingness to think entrepreneurially and invest in public-private partnerships, Hirsch said. "The city entered into agreements with developers that made sense in coordinating projects. That happens because people trust the government."

SEE BRISTOL, 16



Bristol Chamber Board members with Greenville entrepreneur Joe Erwin at the Endeavor co-working space. PHOTOS BY SCOTT ROBERTSON

Local Business for Sale

I was first introduced to Edible Arrangements in 2007 when a family friend invited me to his grand opening just outside my hometown. That day I fell in love with the brand, products and whole experience of visiting the store and sampling the amazing chocolate dipped fruit! Knowing that there was not a store anywhere in the Tri-Cities, I wanted the community to have the same experience I had! We learned more about the franchise and opened our doors in December 2011. We have experienced tremendous growth and have loved growing the brand. However, we have since moved out of state. We realize the store as well as the community will benefit greatly with local ownership. In 2020, Edible is expanding its partnerships with Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory, Maddy & Maize Gourmet Popcorn, CBD products, and cookies and cheesecakes. We are already seeing positive growth again and local ownership will maximize the introduction of these products for future growth!



edible®

Interested buyers, please contact
the owner, Melissa Lubbers, directly at
lubbers_melissa@yahoo.com or (423) 741-7762.



Bristol Chamber Board members listen to Marlie Creasey-Smith, director of Parks and Recreation at Greenville City Hall.

BRISTOL, CONTINUED

It's hard to argue the point. White has been mayor since 1995. Councilwoman Lillian Flemming, who also met with the Bristol group, has been in office since 1981.

Taxpayers have been willing to trust the government to enter into partnerships that have proven beneficial. The Upstate Alliance, a regional economic development effort around Greenville, for instance, encompasses ten counties and their smaller communities. "That organization is responsible for 50 percent of the leads generated," said Mike Panasko, business development manager for the city. The region is glad when the state Department of Commerce brings in a prospect, Panasko said, but in the meantime, it recruits businesses that are good fits.

Another point of interest for Bristol Chamber board members was housing. The Bristol 2040 effort identified it as one of the twin city's most pressing needs. Again, Greenville officials said, public private partnerships have been a huge part of the city's success. The city works with developers, said Jenny Stroud, interim director of economic and community development. For instance, the city has purchased and demolished several dilapidated houses and worked with builders to replace them with up-to-date but affordable homes as part of neighborhood master plans.

Again, said Flemming, the citizens trust the city to do what's right in those deals, in large part because Greenville has made a point of involving citizens in government. City leaders take part in around 40 neighborhood organizations where Flemming said hundreds of citizens will meet to ask questions about projects affecting them.

"We are very intentional about everything we do," White said. "And it's all about trust and relationships. Every big project has come about because of a relationship."

Those relationships include a healthy city-chamber dialogue,

and on the second day of the Bristol group's two-day tour, the Greenville Chamber took over the hosting duties. Carlos Phillips, president and CEO, met with the group at the NEXT Innovation Center a few blocks away from the west end of Main Street. The main topic of conversation was workforce development and talent attraction and retention.

"Our unemployment rate right now in Greenville County is 1.9 percent," Phillips said. "But, we have twice as many open jobs as we have eligible people to put in those jobs." In an effort to address that, Phillips said, the Chamber has undertaken efforts to remove obstacles between employers and potential employees who are not currently part of the labor force.

The secret to filling those jobs, Phillips said is to "dig deeper into your community. You have to remove barriers between people who are outside the workforce participation pool and the jobs they could be doing.

"One barrier might be public transit," Phillips said. "If you get a second shift job at the hotel downtown but the bus stops running after five, you can ride to work, but when that shift ends at nine, how are you going to get home? Affordable housing inventory is another barrier and the availability of affordable child care is another."

Next on the agenda for the Bristol Chamber crew was a lunch with Jennifer Stilwell, executive vice president and chief strategic officer of VisitGreenvilleSC. Stilwell began by pointing out what others had said before her. Greenville did not set out to be a tourist destination. It set out to be a great place to live, and in doing so, became a place other people wanted to come to.

In fact, she said, the booming tourism industry there came about without the benefit of mountains, beaches, theme parks or any other traditional tourist draw. The city, she said,

essentially built its market selling out of an empty wagon.

“When I got here, I asked, ‘So what’s my marketing budget?’” Stilwell said. “They said, ‘It’s 50.’ I said, ‘50 what?’ and they said, ‘\$50,000.’ I thought I had made the biggest mistake of my professional career.”

But Stilwell saw what was going on with Greenville’s downtown and realized that, if marketed properly, the town had a resource that would pay for itself many times over. The city encouraged restaurants to locate downtown and Stilwell marketed them to travel media. Soon sites like *TravelZoo* were proclaiming Greenville to be “one of our six favorite food cities in the U.S.” By 2018, *Travel & Leisure* declared Greenville one of 50 Best Places in the World to Travel.

That same year, the hotel occupancy rate peaked at 71 percent, the city had almost as many visitors for the year (500,000) as Greenville County had residents (510,000) and the average daily rate for a hotel room topped \$100.

Of course, none of that would have happened had Greenville stayed with a \$50,000 marketing budget. In fact, Stilwell’s organization now oversees \$9 million a year in marketing investments. Again, Stilwell said, the citizens of Greenville and Greenville County are willing to make the investment because they see the benefit. The city and county charge visitors not only an accommodation tax, but also a hospitality tax. In 2018, accommodations tax revenue was \$6.17 million and hospitality tax revenue topped \$20.5 million.


“Tourism helps lift Greenville households’ tax burden by \$895 annually in state and local taxes,” Stilwell said. “It creates more than 10,000 jobs and visitor spending benefits county residents with \$273 million in wages and salaries.”

The Bristol Chamber group’s final stop was at a place where it finally was admitted that some of Greenville’s success has been sheer good luck. The Endeavor co-working space on the fourth floor of 1 North Main Street puts most other co-working spaces in America to shame. It has a gym with top of the line equipment. It has a commercial grade kitchen. The main lobby has a ceiling made of shined, decommissioned pennies. It has Italian marble desktops, tabletops and counters.

In 2014, that space had been the planned headquarters of CertusBank, an institution

funded to the tune of \$500 million by venture capitalists. The three executives who were in charge spent lavishly to create a haven of luxury for themselves. They spared no expense until a banking trade publication called attention to how quickly they appeared to be blowing through their capital. CertusBank was soon out of the space at 1 North Main, which sat vacant for more than a year before Joe Erwin, former president of Erwin-Penland Advertising decided to turn the space into a co-working

space for creative and design professionals and freelancers.

As the Bristol Chamber contingent passed through the penny-ceilinged lobby on their way out, Erwin called their attention to a painting called, “The Quote.” He urged them to take its message to heart as they returned to Tennessee and Virginia. The painting includes, in foot high letters, a variation on the words of Nobel physicist Dennis Gabor: “The best way to predict the future is to invent it.” 

LIVIN’ ON THE EDGE



TANNERY KNOBS OVERLOOK | JOHNSON CITY, TENNESSEE

The proposed Tannery Knobs Overlook & Pavilion provides a one-of-a-kind experience and functional amenities with a nod to sustainability. The concept pairs modern forms with endless mountain views to create a unique gathering space at the recently opened mountain bike skills park located in the heart of Johnson City.



3203 HANOVER ROAD, JOHNSON CITY, TN | (423) 952-2700 | THOMASWEEMSARCHITECT.COM

Jarden Zinc Products rebranding to ARTAZN LLC

Change marks half-century in the Greeneville, Tenn., community

by Karen Janette



Tom Wennogle



Teresa Carter



Carl DeSorbo

Those with long memories will know this is not the first time the name on the sign has changed, but the leaders of what has since 2004 been known as Jarden Zinc Products point out a long history of service to the community, whatever the name. In fact, 50 years ago, when Jarden Zinc opened the doors to its Greeneville, Tenn., facility, the company began a policy of full integration of company and community. This legacy of growth and community development didn't begin five decades ago; it goes back as far as Jarden Zinc's own beginnings, 130 years ago.

Best known today for coinage manufacturing and production of high-security coins, Jarden Zinc began as Ball Brothers Glass Manufacturing in 1880, a small jar-canning company that also manufactured the zinc lids for the famous Ball Mason jars. By 1934, the Ball Brothers company managed the largest zinc strip rolling mill in the world, creating new applications for the element along the way. And the company structure was evolving as well. A name change to Ball Corporation took place in 1969. Two decades later, Alltrista Corporation was formed. Comprised of three previous Ball Corp. companies, this entity became the nucleus to what became Jarden Process Solutions, a division of Jarden Corp. In May 2019, as Jarden Zinc Products was nearing its 50-year mark, Jarden Process Solutions, was purchased by One Rock Capital Partners. The private equity firm was focused on creating value by investing in high-potential, middle-market

companies. As this partnership unfolded, the leadership felt it was time to make a more significant change to properly reflect the positive changes that were happening within the business lines. In 2020, Jarden Process Solutions announced it would be known as Jadex Inc., and Jarden Zinc Products would operate under the legal name ARTAZN LLC and the ARTAZN brand.

“We wanted to take this opportunity to create a brand that better represents who we are and demonstrates the comprehensive range of capabilities, products, and services we bring to the market.”

- Tom Wennogle

Today ARTAZN is the largest North American producer of solid zinc strip and zinc-based products and one of the largest in the world. The company is one of the world's leading coin blank manufacturers, with 300 billion coins released into circulation in more than 20 countries. The company also supplies for customers in the automotive, architectural, building, cathodic protection, and specialty industries.

“For over a century in the zinc industry, we have placed a high value on innovation and enhancing our technical capabilities, and we are proud of the visionaries and artists who develop, design, and engineer our zinc products,”

says Tom Wennogle, president of ARTAZN LLC. “As we continue to grow and compete in a global economy, we wanted to take this opportunity to create a brand that better represents who we are and demonstrates the comprehensive range of capabilities, products, and services we bring to the market.”

The rebranding is part of the company's strategy to better reflect craftsmanship, precision, and performance. The name

ARTAZN, Wennogle says, invokes the innovation that occurs when art meets science.

The core values of the company will not be changing with the name, Wennogle adds. "The safety of our employees is our number one priority and having a world class safety program is something that we will continue to pursue. Our employees are like family and it is important to instill a safety-first mentality at work and at homes."


In addition, Wennogle says, environmental stewardship will remain important to ARTAZN. "Everyone takes great measures to preserve our environment through vigorous sustainability initiatives across all business operations." Moving forward, Wennogle says, the company plans to achieve an ISO 14001:2015 environmental certification.

"Supporting our community is part of our responsibility as a thriving organization, and we are honored that we have the capability to provide resources and assistance that makes a difference in their missions to make the Greeneville community a better place. We plan to continue and grow our support as we enter the next phase of our history," adds Wennogle. Jarden Zinc has historically supported organizations such as Niswonger Children's Hospital, United Way, Greene County Food Bank, and Palmettoe Children's Charity.

ARTAZN also supports educational and workforce development initiatives in the Greene County Schools, Tusculum University and East Tennessee State University, as well as the technical programs at Northeast State and Walter State Community Colleges.



Fifty years in Greeneville: the first casting produced at the facility now known as ARTAZN

"We are proud of where we have come from," Wennogle says. "Our rich history and evolution are what brought us to where we are today. And being planted in the history of Greeneville is as equally rewarding. As we look ahead, we will always cherish the path we've traveled as Jarden Zinc, and we are extremely excited about the future ahead as we become known as ARTAZN." 

ARE YOU WORKING WITH THE RIGHT LENDER?

TENNESSEE'S #1 RESIDENTIAL MORTGAGE LENDER

We provide mortgage programs specific to your needs with closings on your schedule.

- Conventional
- FHA (Federal Housing Administration)
- VA (Veterans Administration)
- THDA (Tennessee Housing Development Agency)
- Rural Development
- Additional Loan Programs Available

M MORTGAGE
INVESTORS GROUP

* According to Courthouse Retrieval Systems (CRS), NMLS #34391, TN #109111



BOB HEFTY
BRANCH MANAGER
423-943-0410 CELL
bob.hefty@migonline.com
NMLS #186694, TN #102525



DAVID BROWN
MORTGAGE CONSULTANT
423-202-5911 CELL
seth.belcher@migonline.com
NMLS #922393, TN #198827



BRANDON BURLESON
LOAN OFFICER
423-943-6055 CELL
brandon.burleson@migonline.com
NMLS #1815845, TN #178121



MATT STICKLEY
LOAN OFFICER
423-306-9995 CELL
matt.stickley@migonline.com
NMLS #1805581, TN #173916



SETH BELCHER
MORTGAGE CONSULTANT
423-300-0571 CELL
seth.belcher@migonline.com
NMLS #1828388, TN #188884

JOHNSON CITY
423-283-4702
508 Princeton Rd, Ste 201

KINGSPORT
423-765-2211
1825 N Eastman Rd, Ste 3

WWW.MIGONLINE.COM



Winter Innovations becomes first company with local ties to merit Angel Roundtable backing

by Scott Robertson

The Angel Roundtable (ART), an angel investment organization based in Northeast Tennessee, announced in February a new investment in Winter Innovations, Inc., a medical device company. Co-founded by Lia Winter and Piney Flats, Tenn., native Preston Dishner, Winter Innovations is working to launch its EasyWhip product, a two-part suturing needle designed to facilitate the whip stitch used in orthopedic surgery to repair torn ligaments and tendons.

Winter and Dishner met while both were working for an orthopedic firm in Florida. “I did a lot of R&D and product testing and was struck by how tedious and inconsistent the stitching they would do for surgeries was,” Winter said. “So, I came up with an idea to create a new needle to make it easier and faster for the surgeon to stitch.”

Both Winter and Dishner went on to the University of Tennessee to begin work on MBAs. In 2017, when Winter won her first pitch competition with what would become the EasyWhip product, she took the \$1,500 prize, got a business license and recruited Dishner.

Tony Lettich, managing director of ART, first became aware of Winter and Dishner when they began to make a habit of winning pitch competitions around the Southeast. In all, the company won almost \$150,000 at those competitions before pitching to ART.

Lettich asked Winter to consider pitching to ART at the roundtable’s October 2019 meeting, which they did. Needless to say, the company was a hit. “I’d say within two or three weeks we had a term sheet in place with them and moved to final due diligence,” Lettich said. ART ended up leading the pre-seed round of investment in the company. Ballard Ventures co-invested in the startup with ART. Tony Keck, Ballard Health executive vice president of system innovation and chief population health officer, said, “It’s exciting to see entrepreneurs from our region creating medical technology that has the potential to benefit patients around the globe. Ballard Ventures was created precisely for this reason - to leverage the clinical, logistical, and financial capabilities of Ballard Health to improve

health outcomes, lower health care costs, and drive local economic development. We are proud to have provided early support to Winter Innovations in coordination with other local investors.”

The funding raised from Ballard Ventures, ART and other investors in the pre-seed round will be used to initiate


manufacturing, Winter said. “Initially, we were hand building all of our prototypes and our needles that we were testing and showing to surgeons. But we now have an established manufacturer that is FDA compliant. So, we’re going through validations with them. But really our next big milestone now is to obtain FDA clearance through the expedited 510k clearance pathway. So, we’re doing all of the testing right now and plan to submit our 510K to the FDA by this summer.”

That means that by summer, the company will already be looking

for its next round of funding. ART will be interested in taking part in that round, Lettich said.

“Absolutely we will consider another round of financing for them,” Lettich said. “We like to invest on a follow-up basis in those companies that we’ve invested in that are demonstrating an ability to meet their milestones. I have no doubt that these guys will.”

That next round will no doubt be larger than the round ART just led, Lettich said, and, he added, that’s the way it should be.

“We believe that our money is effectively wasted unless the next round of financing can be obtained from a venture capital firm. One of the key failure points there is the inability of some of these companies to get through the due diligence process - the rigorous due diligence processes that a formally structured VC would have. So, we set up our process so that the company has to be able to get through our process. That indicates that they will get through that VC process, or at the very least, we feel we’re capable of coaching them so they will get to that point where due diligence is not going to be a problem at the next level.” 

“It’s exciting to see entrepreneurs from our region creating medical technology that has the potential to benefit patients around the globe.”

- Tony Keck

Preston Dishner and Lia Winter of Winter Innovations, Inc.



Rebranded FoundersForge touts positive momentum during summit meeting

by Dave Ongie

Less than a month after StartupTri rebranded as FoundersForge, the entrepreneurial support organization held a summit at BrightRidge headquarters Feb. 20.

The event featured an update on BrightRidge's broadband rollout and provided entrepreneurs with the opportunity to share their new initiatives in a "Minute to Win It" format. Those with ideas for potential start-ups were able to pitch them, and FoundersForge co-founder David Nelson gave an update on progress being made in the effort to foster new start-up businesses in the region.

During the late-January press conference announcing the rebranding of FoundersForge, Nelson pointed toward an improving climate for entrepreneurship in the region and a more substantial feeling of regional cooperation as reasons for the rebranding effort. That positive momentum was certainly palpable in the BrightRidge conference room throughout the February summit meeting.

"It's extremely exciting to see this happen, and it just feels like a powder keg ready to explode and take off," Nelson said.

For Patrick Savage, the early-morning event was an excellent way to begin his fourth day as an entrepreneur. Savage recently left Bristol Motor Speedway to start Savage Creates, a creative services company.

While the timing was right personally for Savage to make the jump, he also cited several advantages he has seen in doing business as an entrepreneur in our region. Savage said the combination of a low cost of living, access to high-speed Internet and ease of travel to Nashville, Knoxville and Asheville are factors that put him in a strong position to be competitive in the marketplace.

Savage recounted a recent conversation he had with a colleague who has had success landing clients in larger metropolitan areas thanks to the advantages our region affords.

"When they go to that area, they're not competing on the same standard of living," Savage said. "They're able to come in and win a competitive bid because they're located here. This is an amazing hub."

The ability to telecommute will only become stronger once BrightRidge finishes rolling out its Broadband services. The utility is investing \$66 million in a fiber-optic and Wi-Fi network that BrightRidge Chief Broadband Officer Stacy Evans said has "shortened the distance between Northeast Tennessee and the world."

Inside the region, the chasms that used to separate municipal and county governments are also showing signs of narrowing as regionalism begins to gain traction. A prime example came during an open discussion period late in the meeting when Jason Hudson, Kingsport's economic development director, talked about the joy he feels when professionals in Johnson City or



FoundersForge co-founder David Nelson with BrightRidge CEO Jeff Dykes. PHOTO BY DAVE ONGIE

Bristol score a victory.


"My priority is Kingsport, but I sell this region," Hudson said. "We're selling our region, and we've all got our strengths. Knowing what everybody has is how we're going to build this region and support it."

Regionalism can mean many things to many people, but Nelson's definition doesn't differ very much from what was on display during the February summit meeting. Several business owners were in the same room, supporting the efforts of those who they could potentially compete with in the marketplace. "It really is about coming together and working together for a common goal, but competing in a friendly way," Nelson said. "There's nothing wrong with that."

Entrepreneurship is emerging as a key area where municipal and county governments are starting to make substantial investments in order to keep talented young professionals and recent college graduates inside our region.

Gov. Bill Lee's 2021 budget includes \$5 million to renovate the historic Ashe Street Courthouse, which leaders in Johnson City, Washington County and ETSU hope to convert into an entrepreneurial incubator.

"I feel like our leadership right now is really seeing the opportunity and the potential of our space," Nelson said. "In a lot of ways, they're driving us forward as much as the start-up organizations and the startups themselves are. It's amazing how we've all really started going in the same direction."

"We all have our different ways of doing it, and our own speeds," Nelson said, "but at the end of the day, the fact that we can all have this vision of what the future can be here will change this place." 

Bennett brings new title, can-do attitude to Kingsport's talent development efforts

by Scott Robertson

Vanessa Bennett is a familiar presence in Kingsport's education and business communities. She's been in charge of the Leadership Kingsport program for the Kingsport Chamber foundation, but now she has a new title and a broader outlook on the process of bringing Kingsport's students and teachers together with potential employers.

Bennett, now director of operations and talent development for the Kingsport Chamber Foundations is building on a history of good relations between the Chamber and the Kingsport City Schools, both of which have offices in the same downtown building.

"I don't think we realized how much we work with them until we lived together," Bennett says. "We say they're great roommates."

Bennett and Lora Barnett, executive director of Workforce Development & Government Relations for the Chamber both work with the school systems every day. "I think we scare them sometimes with some of the ideas that we have, but they're very willing and very appreciative," Bennett says of her school system counterparts.

Moving forward, Bennett says she wants to build on a program that was started as a partnership between the schools and the Leadership Kingsport effort last year. "Leadership Kingsport does some community impact project every year," Bennett says. "The greenbelt came from one of those projects. Last year we took a different approach. We wanted to do something with the school system. What better way to make an impact than dealing with the students who are our future?"

"We thought we might do a career expo," Bennett says, "but the schools wanted us to bring it down a notch and just do soft skills." So, the leadership program took several months developing a program before taking it into Kingsport's four Title I schools. "Every expo was different for each school," Bennett explains. "They all took the fourth and fifth grades and did all sorts of team-building exercises and leadership skills training. It was the kind of things teachers frankly don't have time to teach that may not be being taught at home."

The plan for 2020 is to more than double the program's size,



Vanessa Bennett

hitting all eight of the city's elementary schools and both middle schools.

Another program done in conjunction with the schools doubles as both a workforce development program and a talent development program. Generally, workforce development centers around educating students to find pathways to prosperity while talent development focuses more on finding the best possible situations for those who are already out of school and are either part of the workforce or are candidates to re-enter the employment participation pool.

"The 'Nights of Discovery' actually started with Roosevelt Elementary," Bennett says. "We had a parent and family night at the Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM). We even had to bus families there because some didn't have transportation or even know where the RCAM was."

"We had around 300 people there and the kids actually got to go around and get demonstrations of the different things offered at the RCAM. At the same time, we pulled the parents into a larger room and talked with them about the opportunities not just for their students, but possibly for them."

"It turned out that a lot of them were interested in going back to school themselves or actually finishing their degree. This is a Title I school. Some of those parents hadn't finished school when they originally had the opportunity. They actually took us up on that, and Northeast State became a great partner because they were in the room and got to give the parents some hands-on information."

Because of the success of that venture, another student/parent engagement opportunity was created at Dobyns-Bennett High School. "Just last month we did it for the middle schools and took it to D-B. We had the RCAM and Northeast State come up and set up booths. Then all the seventh and eighth grade students got to go tour the career paths for the different CTE courses offered there. They had no idea that there were so many opportunities. It opened the eyes of both the students and the parents."

In the future, Bennett says, it's likely that the event will become more than an annual affair. "When we did the feedback surveys, we found they would love to have another one so they can see all the opportunities. There are just so many that you just can't get it all done in. They just got a little touch of it, especially with the RCAM bringing their demonstrations too."

Bennett says Kingsport understands the need to take kids through programs like her Project Hope, to show them there are opportunities out there for them, either through college or the welding program at the RCAM. "We need those people in the workforce." ■



Executive Director Gene Cossey (center) reports on the proposed memorandum of understanding between the airport, Northeast State Community College and the Tennessee Board of Regents. PHOTOS BY SCOTT ROBERTSON

On-again, off-again Northeast State hangar project at TRI is on again

Vacant hangar to be refurbished

by Scott Robertson

Northeast State Community College and Tri-Cities Airport (TRI) are back in the workforce development business together. A project in which the college and airport will work together to create a space for Northeast State students to learn aerospace industry skills will move forward after months of what Airport Authority Chair Dr. Jon Smith referred to as “fits and starts.”

The authority voted unanimously on Feb. 27 to contract for \$95,800 with Atkins, an engineering company that often works with the airport, to handle design and bid work for the project, pending Northeast State’s receipt of an Appalachian Regional Commission grant and pending the college signing a memorandum of understanding with the airport.

Ten months ago, the airport authority agreed to spend \$200,000 designing a new hangar for the project. The plans at the time were for the college to provide \$1.6 million of the

\$3 million project cost through an Appalachian Regional Commission grant. The airport received a grant from the state of Tennessee to cover part of its share.

That plan, however, unraveled when Northeast State decided it would rather build a structure on its side of the fence that separates the college from the airport. The airport acquiesced, and handed back to Tennessee the grant money that would have covered the airport’s portion of the construction for a new hangar.

“We did ask (Northeast State) if it would affect their grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission,” airport manager Gene Cossey told the authority at the Feb. 27 meeting. “At that time, they did not think that it would. But a few weeks later they did get notice from the ARC that it would affect their grant and that they needed to have a location on the airport to get the grant.”

By that time, the state funds that would have helped fund a

SEE HANGAR, 26



RESPONSIVE, ACCURATE, TIMELY SERVICE

The partners and staff of over 100 at Blackburn, Childers & Steagall, CPAs take pride in quality accounting, tax and assurance work done on time for nearly 60 years.

TAX PREPARATION AND PLANNING FOR:
INDIVIDUALS | BUSINESSES | ESTATES & TRUSTS | NONPROFITS

JOHNSON CITY, TN	423.282.4511
KINGSPORT, TN	423.246.1725
GREENEVILLE, TN	423.638.8516
BOONE, NC	828.264.3595

BCSCPA.COM

HANGAR, CONTINUED

new hangar on the airport property had been reappropriated to another airport and so were no longer available for the Northeast State/TRI project.

The plan now is to rehabilitate Hangar 301, a vacant hangar on the far side of the airfield from the main terminal. According to a memorandum of understanding signed by the airport and Northeast State but not yet signed by the Tennessee Board of Regents, that hangar will be leased to the college for the purpose of housing an aircraft maintenance technician program. There is no guarantee this plan will succeed either. Cossey and Smith both spoke in the meeting of “hurdles and hoops to jump over and through.”

For instance, the ARC still has to approve the notion of rehabilitating an existing structure instead of building a new one. The Tennessee Board of Regents must still sign the memorandum of understanding. The college and the airport must come to mutually agreeable terms on the lease price for the rehabilitated hangar over what airport officials are planning to pitch as a 20-year lease. And, the rehabilitation of the building must be done to both parties’ satisfaction.

Normally, Cossey said, he would not even approach the authority for approval of anything with so many i’s undotted and t’s uncrossed. However, since the airport must now go back to the state for new funds, time is of the essence. “We need to be on top of this and we need to be moving now,” Cossey told the authority. “Otherwise, it will put our timeline way out beyond where we want.”

Northeast State and TRI officials have a shared goal of having airframe classes underway at the facility in Fall Semester 2021. “We’re afraid that if we wait too much longer to bring this to you that we’ll be behind on the grant curve with the state and we’d put it up into 2022,” Cossey said. “We don’t want to push it that far. So that’s why we’re bringing it to you even with these pending issues.”

There are some blessings that have come with the consternation over the changing plans, Cossey said. “One of the benefits is going to be that (Northeast State was) going to have to spend almost \$400,000 on a sidewalk from the school to the new hangar. Nobody liked the idea of spending that much money on a sidewalk. There will also be more parking at this location for their students.”

From the airport’s perspective, the silver lining is that the existing hangar location is closer to where Aerospace Park will be. Director of Business Development Mark Canty told the authority he consistently hears from companies and site selectors that one of the most positive aspects of Aerospace Park is the workforce development aspect that the Northeast State partnership will bring. In fact, Canty said, “a lot of them want the workforce development to be in full swing,” before they will seriously contemplate moving operations to the park.

“We don’t have anybody ready to sign on the dotted line right now,” Canty said. “We are hearing from some prospects they would like to see that the project is completed before they get more serious about looking at it. We’ve all been involved with government projects that get three-quarters completed and



Richard Blevins of Northeast State Community College points to Hangar 301 in an aerial photo of Tri-Cities Airport.

then stop. So, I think we’ll have a lot more serious interest the closer we get to completion.”

“We like the location much better than building a new hangar,” Cossey said. “We think it works better for the program. We’re just concerned ARC won’t approve it but again, I think we’ve hit enough bases. We even got some congressional support going over to ARC in a letter stating this is important and valid. So, we think that this is the best option for us and we’re just hoping we get over these hurdles to make it happen.”

In other TRI news, the airport’s finances for the current fiscal year are good. Director of Finance Rene Weber told the authority that for the first six months of the year, revenues are up 8.7 percent (around \$350,000) and expenses are down around 3.5 percent (around \$125,000). Additionally, Weber said, passenger traffic is up 12.2 percent after a 6.2 percent increase over the course of the previous year.

The airport authority also signed off on transferring the Avis Rent-A-Car operation on-site from Wallace Leasing to Avis Budget Rental Car LLC (Avis Corporate). In addition, the authority approved a one-year extension for its fixed base operations contract with Tri-City Aviation. The contract is generally re-upped on a five-year basis, Cossey said, but that did not happen last year because of the timing of the departure of previous director Patrick Wilson and Cossey’s hiring. Both parties agreed it made sense this year to agree to a one-year extension during which time both will discuss how best to move forward a year from now. Finally, the authority heard from David Jones, deputy executive director, regarding the state of Tennessee moving ahead with plans to implement safety improvements along the highway in front of the airport, including widening and the addition of traffic signals. [B]

ApprenticeshipTN launches

Because a qualified and skilled workforce is crucial to Tennessee's continued economic success, and to ensure there is a pipeline of workers for Tennessee businesses, the state in February launched a comprehensive program to raise awareness about the benefits of Registered Apprenticeships.

ApprenticeshipTN is a major initiative to increase the number of skilled employees available within Tennessee's workforce.

To help promote the program, the state developed a new website; ApprenticeshipTN.com. The site is a gateway to information about Registered Apprenticeship programs in Tennessee. It provides all the information needed to explore the process and to find out how to become involved in a program.

An Apprenticeship is a proven training program that is used as a talent development strategy for recruiting, training and retaining world-class talent and has been used in industry for decades. Apprenticeships are registered and validated by the U.S. Department of Labor.


During the program, apprentices have supervised on-the-job training, along with job-related education, all while earning a wage that increases during the progression of the program. Registered Apprenticeships are designed for full-time positions with an employer.

"Apprenticeship is a tried and true method to develop and maintain qualified employees," said Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Dr. Jeff McCord. "This

new program will help both employers and employees realize the benefits of apprenticeships."

As part of the initiative, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development has established an apprenticeship organization, which will soon have a regional director in each grand division of the state. These apprenticeship directors will work directly with employers, higher education institutions, community groups, trade organizations, and other state agencies to develop and implement new registered apprenticeship programs.

Even before the official launch, ApprenticeshipTN has already helped facilitate eleven new Registered Apprenticeship programs, with more than 200 apprentices, in both traditional and non-traditional industry sectors.

ApprenticeshipTN is powered by the Tennessee Workforce Development System steering team. This group consists of seven state agencies working together to help grow Tennessee's skilled workforce. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), Department of Education, Department of Economic and Community Development, Department of Human Services, and Department of Correction each play a critical role in the ApprenticeshipTN program. 



| bjournal.com

Information you can use to make
better decisions for your business
and improve your bottom line.

Breaking News | Digital Editions | Mobile Friendly



Manufacturing
Excellence

Government
Contracting

Energy Efficiency
& Environmental
Management

Health, Safety
& Emergency
Preparedness

Economic
Development

UT CIS has the expertise to help you
succeed. Contact your local Solutions
Consultant today to get started.



Center for Industrial Services
INSTITUTE for PUBLIC SERVICE

Kenny Smith
Solutions Consultant,
Northeast Tennessee

kenny.smith@tennessee.edu
423-335-7417
www.cis.tennessee.edu

Tusculum University's College of Business named among the Top 50 Business Schools in the nation

Study.com has ranked Tusculum University's College of Business among its Top 50 Business Schools in America. The national, web-based organization picked Tusculum 48th, touting its diversity of programming with a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Arts in business administration and six concentrations within the BA program. The description of Tusculum also highlighted the university's pride in its highly successful Master of Business Administration program and showcased the activities of Tusculum's Business Club.

"We evaluated hundreds of schools for this list and selected Tusculum University based on academic and career resources for business students, the quality of education and program accessibility among other factors," the company said. "There's more to a school than the academics, however, and by taking into account features like extracurricular opportunities and partnered companies, our rankings aim to help you find not just a great school but a school that's a great fit for you."

Study.com uses data sources such as the U.S. Department of Education's evaluation of graduation rates, costs of attendance, student retention and school websites. Through these resources, the company said, it has been able to identify effective programs that are within reach. The list of the top 50 includes on-campus and online programs, of which the Tusculum College of Business offers both.

Ethisphere: Eastman among world's most ethical companies

Eastman Chemical Company has been recognized by Ethisphere, a global leader in defining and advancing the standards of ethical business practices, as one of the 2020 World's Most Ethical Companies. The honor, which Eastman has received for seven consecutive years, underscores the company's commitment to leading with the highest ethical business standards and focusing its efforts to foster a zero-incident mindset, including zero incidents of unethical behavior.

Eastman has been recognized seven consecutive years and is one of only two honorees in the chemical industry. In 2020, 132 honorees were recognized spanning 21 countries and 51 industries.

"We are exceptionally proud to receive this award for the seventh year in a row. As we celebrate the company's centennial anniversary this year, the values and principles that Eastman was founded on in 1920 still guide us in 2020," said Mark Costa, Board Chair and CEO. "Eastman's purpose is to enhance the quality of life in a material way. We bring that purpose to life through our commitment to ethical business practices and a zero-incident mindset, as well as our determination to address complex global issues and positively impact society."

Your Local Staffing & Recruiting Resource

Industrial & Office/Administrative Support

LUTTRELL
STAFFING GROUP



Experience the
Difference,
Contact Your Local
Office Today!

LuttrellStaffing.com

Meet Our Founders:
Marty Luttrell and David Luttrell

MAIL
Works, inc.

320 Wesley Street
Johnson City, TN 37601
423.283.9875

facebook.com/mailworks.tn
www.mailworksinc.com

MARKETPLACE

For advertising information call 423.854.0140

The Johnson City News & Neighbor



**That's not a threat.
It's a fact.**

The most recent Circulation Verification Council audit of the News & Neighbor shows:

96% of area households regularly receive our publication
95% regularly read our publication
81% frequently purchase products/services advertised

It's Verified: We Deliver
jcnewsandneighbor.com
423.979.1300

*Source: Dec. 2018 CVC Publication Audit Report.

Painting, Sandblasting
Floor Coatings
Polished Concrete
ICE CLEAN
Dry Ice (CO2) Blast Cleaning



423-928-8351
estimating@gardnerpaint.com

**Budget Office
Furniture
of the Tri-Cities, Inc.**

*The Best In New & Used
Since 1982!*

1-800-729-6522

**20 COMMONWEALTH AVE
BRISTOL, VA 24201**

www.budgetofficefurniture.com



**GREENE COUNTY
LAND & AUCTION CO.**

COMPLETE REAL ESTATE & AUCTION SERVICE

BUY • SELL • TRADE

Farmland • Residential • Estate
Commercial • Acreage

*"All we ask is the you talk with us
before contracting your property"*

Col. Larry H. Jones
Owner / Broker / Auctioneer

Vicki W. Jones
Owner / Affiliate Broker

*"We don't want all the
business... Just Yours!"*

**(423) 639-5231
400 North Irish Street
Greeneville, TN**

The Genuine. The Original.



Ken Shaw
General Manager
423-282-9191

garagedoorjohnsoncity.com

We furnish and install the following:
Commercial and Residential Sectional Doors
Loading Dock Equipment | Rolling Steel Doors



Public & Contract Warehousing
Locations in Greeneville & Kingsport
Rail Service NS/CSX • Local Fleet of Trucks
Reworking & Light Assembly
Crossdock Service • Food Grade/Cooler

102 Coile Street, Greeneville, TN 37745
Phone: (423) 639-1163 • Fax: (423) 639-7270

www.sopakcotn.com
wkeller@sopakcotn.com

E-Journal

The Business Journal of Tri-Cities TN/VA

Get important local,
regional and state
business news first!

Sign up by
sending "Yes" to
marketing@bjournal.com
to receive our newsletter.



Press on

by Don Fenley

No one should ignore the enthusiasm for regionalism that has been and is building. That doesn't mean there aren't or won't be disagreements. That's not the point. The point is the momentum among government, civic and business institutions toward that principle is greater now than it has been in recent history.

With that said, it's understandable that economic gains are celebrated. The area saw some population growth in 2018. There was an increase in per capita income. And payroll jobs growth moved past its pre-recession benchmark last year.

Those are encouraging economic green shoots and hopefully signs of things to come. But it would be a mistake to think the region is on a victory course and everything forward is smooth sailing. It's important to visit and revisit how local gains look in context to the economic performance of our neighbors and not shy away from the uncomfortable data that shows the progress being made is still not good enough.

The performance of the area's labor market last year is a prime example. Employment and labor force gains began increasing in the second quarter and continued advancing through year's end. At the same time, the region's economy continued adding nonfarm payroll jobs at an average of 46 new jobs a month. At year's end, the preliminary, non-adjusted net gain was 550 jobs – up 50 from 2018's gain. The preliminary total was 1,800 jobs more than there were in 2008 – the year before the Great Recession hit the local economy.

Good news, for sure. But some of the shine comes off with a 2010 to 2019 performance comparison with neighboring economies. The Tri-Cities growth was 4.1 percent compared to 11.7 percent in Chattanooga-Cleveland, 11.9 percent in Knoxville-Morristown, and 33.1 percent in Asheville-Brevard. The Tri-Cities' growth was good – but not good enough to be competitive.

Data collected and reported by Moody's Analytics and the Wall Street Journal expands on the labor market big picture. The study released in late February ranked 381 metro areas on five metrics: unemployment rate, labor-force participation rate, job growth, labor-force growth and wage growth. Unfortunately, it focused on Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) and not the

Consolidated Statistical Area (CSA) base adopted as the local regional movement standard. But that doesn't negate the outcome. Kingsport-Bristol ranked 189 in the 328 metros under a million population. The Johnson City MSA ranked 226. The two

local MSAs shared middle-of-the-pack small metro group ranking for unemployment and job growth. The rankings dropped for labor force participation and labor force participation growth rankings. And they were in the bottom 10 for wage growth.

The Tri-Cities faces ample headwinds in its quest for job growth. Its labor force – like the overall demographic – is older than the state and the national medians. It has a chronic underemployment challenge that's being targeted by trade and tech education efforts. And when it comes to talent attraction, we hope the region's favorable status as a low cost of living area is at least equal to its reputation for low wages.

We may celebrate our gains, but must keep them in context with the reality that the Tri-Cities' needs to exceed, or at least equal – not lag – our neighbors' economic performance.

In the words of former President Calvin Coolidge, "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan 'Press On' has solved and will always solve the problems of the human race."





Home Loans

Purchase
Refinance
Construction



Kathy Fields
423-989-4426
kathy.fields@citizensbank24.com
NMLS# 493907



Vic Feathers
423-610-3020
vic.feathers@citizensbank24.com
NMLS# 493906



Xenia Brown
423-610-3088
xenia.brown@citizensbank24.com
NMLS# 1649065



David Oiler
423-547-2062
david.oiler@citizensbank24.com
NMLS# 493905

citizensbank24.com



NMLS# 449222

MEMBER FDIC



**Citizens
BANK**

Bank your own way.

Did you know?

Ballad Health cares for all patients regardless of their ability to pay.



As a not-for-profit health system, Ballad Health serves **everyone** who needs care.



- Uninsured
- Insured
- Low-income



For-profit organizations have no such **obligation** to care for those who are unable to pay.



In fact...

Our **largest competitor** for diagnostic services in the region provided **less than \$3,000** in free, or charity care to the poor last year. So, **Ballad Health cared for** those people who were without insurance and were unable to pay.



Ballad Health provided **free care** to the poor costing more than



\$82 million



\$37 million charity care



\$45 million unreimbursed Medicaid



At least **85% discount**

on services for those without insurance, likely making Ballad Health the lowest cost option.



Ballad Health provides award-winning **service and care** to people who are **uninsured**, to those on **low-income** programs like TennCare and Medicaid, and to people who **have insurance**.

balladhealth.org



If you **have insurance** and a **high deductible**, Ballad Health also has **programs to reduce** your out-of-pocket **costs**.

Call Ballad Health to learn more about financial **assistance options**.



Be alert

Some for-profit organizations are **wrongly advertising**, or distributing information, based on published full **pricing comparisons**. This information is misleading, and **could end up costing you more money**.



For a price quote on a specific procedure, please call **423.431.1776**.