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Madison's Managed, Balanced, But Widespread Growth

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DEVELOPMENT

After Years of Planning, Constellation Huntsville is Underway



After decades of planning and dreaming, Constellation Huntsville is finally under construction.

By Alan Clemons - Page 7

TRAVEL / LEISURE

Space & Rocket Center Launches Shuttle Restoration Project



The Pathfinder space shuttle is facing a multi-year, multi-million dollar restoration at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center.

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Madison's Managed, Balance

By Kimber

Over the years, Madison has been referred to as Huntsville's bedroom community.

For those who have lived in the area since the beginning of the space program, people were said to live or work, "out in Madison."

It is a community that has for so long been considered a quaint little rural stop on the way to the Rocket City, that aside from a single event known as the "Affair at Madison Station," it even missed mention in history books about the Civil War.

Well, Huntsville's little bedroom community has awakened, and it has been coming for a long time.

In 1990, Madison's population was approximately 15,000. In 2000, it had doubled to 30,000, and, according to the census, in 2019 it had grown to almost 50,000 people.

Today, Madison is one of the fastest growing cities in the Southeast. It has one of the highest per capita incomes and a school system recognized for scholastic excellence at the local, state, and national level.

Everywhere you look, businesses are throwing open their doors; new buildings are rising out of the distinctive "redstone" clay; residential communities are spreading out; roads are widening; and aging buildings, parks, and residential communities are being revitalized.

"It scares me when I hear people talk about Madison's explosive growth because the explosive growth is happening throughout the entire area, the multiple communities in Madison County," said Madison Mayor Paul Finley. "I prefer to say Madison is managing and balancing our growth."

"One of the things I think we've done a good job of is rather than taking every subdivision that wants to build, instead, manage the process with a focus primarily on the economic development side of retail and commercial, knowing it's not going to be that hard to bring housing here if we balance our opportunities."

While the Mayor may be man-



aging and balancing the growth as opportunities arise, the growth is so widespread it is visible along every street and in every neighborhood.

Starting with the skyline-altering Town Madison, the Rocket City could not ask for a more inviting gateway than Madison!

Minutes from a bustling Huntsville International Airport, named the Best Small Airport in the United States by USA Today's 10 Best Reader's Choice awards, and a line drive out of Toyota Field with its baseball diamond shimmering underneath the stadium lights lies the world-renowned U.S. Space & Rocket Center; Redstone Arsenal; and

Cummings Research Park, home to dozens of Fortune 500 companies with their advanced manufacturing and high-tech capabilities.

Fanned out across both sides of a revitalized Madison Boulevard are luxury homes such as the Heights at Town Madison and The Station high-rise apartments at Town Madison.

Just announced and set to start construction early this year is a mixed-use project developed by Novare Group out of Atlanta. Across from the Madison Golf Center on Lime Quarry Road within the Town Madison development, a 290-unit apartment complex with eight live and work units, will be built with

approximately 5,000 square feet of commercial and coworking space for its residents, and more than 68,000 square feet of open space.

Popular restaurants and coffee shops like Starbucks, Outback Steakhouse and J. Alexander's are opening soon. Both have been stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Many of these restaurant venues are having to go back to the drawing board and redesign their restaurants based on today versus the world a year ago," said Finley. "They are taking a little extra time to look at more outdoor dining, drive throughs, curbside pick-up and how to do take-out if they have never done it before. The take-out business has expanded dramatically, and they want the right type of store to meet the new demand."

Boutique hotels Home2 Suites and the Avid will soon be joined by resort-style hotels and entertainment venues such as the Hotel Margaritaville.

Infrastructure, said Finley, is part of managing and balancing growth.

He explains that in 2010 and 2011, Hughes Road at U.S. 72, and Wall Triana at U.S. 72 were the two highest traffic accident areas in Madison.

"When we put our efforts into



STORY

ed, But Widespread Growth

erly Ballard

redoing those two intersections for safety, adding double turn lanes and more, it became an economic development driver in those areas,” Finley said. “Two old shopping centers were revitalized so that Planet Fitness and several popular restaurants were created out in front.

“Two years ago, those same accident studies showed I-565 at the Wall Triana exit as the highest accident area. It was also difficult to get to the Ruby Tuesday and Cracker Barrel once you got off at that exit,” Finley said. “We applied a grant and redid the design, but it is only about 30 percent finished.”

There are now three hotels at the Wall Triana exit – the Clarion Pointe and two new hotels, the Avid and Home 2 Suites, as well as Twice Daily.

“With that being the first exit coming from the west to Town Madison, that intersection has to change,” said Finley. “We are looking at how improving it for safety, will also create economic development and improve accessibility.”

Across from Town Madison, Madison Boulevard is getting a heavy revitalization.

“There is a big reason for it,” Mayor Finley said. “We have an agreement with businesses along Madison Boulevard that if you tear down a building, improve a building, or build a new building, or if we need to put in a traffic light to make the location safer or more accessible, then we’ll do that, but we want to see better signage from your business.”

One of the new kids in town in that busy area is Terramé Day Spa, Hair Salon & Blow Dry Bar. Terramé started in Huntsville 18 years ago and the Madison location is its third. The 16,660 square foot building is the largest freestanding hair salon and day spa in Alabama, excluding hotel and resort spas.

Mike and Charla Johnson and Mike’s brothers, Jeff and Charles, are partners in the business and in the 5,000 square-foot commercial space

they are building next door for lease.

Resilience and a determination to warrior on despite COVID-19, they plan to open by Feb 1.

“We are very happy they chose our city,” said Finley. “Terramé will draw daytime traffic to Madison and although we have a lot of people who come home to Madison after work, I am focusing on offering quality of life services that bring more people to Madison to shop, dine, and enjoy the day here.”

“That is managing growth,” he said.

Several road projects in addition to the Wall Triana and Madison Boulevard intersection are underway, including restriping Intergraph Way, widening Lime Quarry Road, and improving the intersection between the two.

They are lengthening Short Road in downtown to open a better thoroughfare from the new Avenue Madison project, and the City will begin work on the Balch and Gillespie roads intersections by the second quarter 2021.

Hughes Road and Sullivan Street are undergoing major widening projects expected to be complete at the end of 2021, according to Mary Beth

Broeren, Madison City Planner.

“Hughes Plaza, across from City Hall, is undergoing a complete upgrade,” Broeren said. “A couple of existing tenants, Bicycle Cove and Interiors by Consign, will remain, but Absolute Nutrition just opened in November; and Fleet Feet, a physical therapy business, and a coffee shop will be new tenants in 2021.”

The Madison Chamber of Commerce is moving next door into a converted house, providing more space, better visibility, and easier access.

“That is big for us,” said Finley. “Finally getting the opportunity to revitalize that shopping plaza, getting a Fleet Feet and a nutrition store, with the Chamber right next door – all right across the street from City Hall is a big deal to us and making a positive impact.”

To the west of downtown Madison, the Argento at Oakland Springs developed by Sterling Development has been approved at the entrance to the Village at Oakland Springs on the south side of Huntsville-Browns Ferry Road.

“This mixed-use project will contain 262 apartments and approximately 18,000 square feet of

commercial space, similar in character and design to the Village of Providence in Huntsville,” said Broeren. “Construction is expected to start this quarter.”

The extension of the Mill Creek Greenway is finished except for some last-minute landscaping; and the City has added parking and a complete park at the Bradford Creek Trailhead. Both Bradford Creek and the Palmer Park expansion will be complete in March.

“We are working on a renovation to Home Place Park to create an outdoor venue for small concerts such as the summer Concert in the Park series,” said Broeren.

Formerly held at the Gazebo on the Village Green on Main Street, they have outgrown it.

“We will move them to Home Place Park between The Avenue Madison project and the high school football stadium where we will have a small amphitheater. Construction has started and should be complete by this summer, in time for the Concert in the Park series.”

“These park projects go towards quality-of-life improvements that are vital to our growth and prosperity,” said Finley. ♦



Photo by Steve Babin

COVER STORY

Huntsville's BIG Picture Becomes Clearer with Opening of Hays Farm Greenway



TRAVEL / LEISURE

It's for the Birds: Huntsville Botanical Gardens Introduces Tweetsville



As you enter, there's a giant bird house, reminiscent of the iconic "See Rock City" ad campaigns, only with a twist: "See Rocket City" is painted in bold white letters on its big red roof.

By Lori J. Connors - Page 7

SPORTS / RECREATION

Prelude to Tokyo: Team USA Rolls into 2021 Paralympic Cycling Season in Huntsville



The latest jewel in Huntsville's crown is the Huntsville Paralympic Cycling Open – a stepping-stone event for the 2021 Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

By Kimberly Ballard - Page 14

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COVER STORY

Huntsville's BIG Picture Becomes Clearer with Opening of Hays Farm Greenway

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photos Courtesy City of Huntsville

City leaders unveiled one more important link in Huntsville's citizen-driven BIG Picture plan to ensure long-term success and vitality in the city.

The opening of the Hays Farm Greenway, featuring the first phase of the Elgie's Walk Greenway, also includes an early intersection with the vast Singing River Trail network, bringing the city closer to accomplishing its goal of connecting the region to its rich history and preserving its pristine environment via walking, biking, and hiking trails and greenways.

"With more spaces to walk, bike, and run, our residents can enjoy the outdoors and take in the beauty of nature around us," said Mayor Tommy Battle. "It's no secret greenways and trails support health and wellness, promote tourism, and increase property values.

"They also serve as a great workforce development tool, as many companies looking to locate here want better recreation and transportation opportunities for their employees."

The first 2½ miles of the 5.3-mile trail around the former Hays Farm property is named for Elgie Hays, the original landowner (1906) and grandfather of local developer, John Hays.

The newly opened portion of Elgie's Walk Greenway is adjacent to Haysland Road and stretches from Grissom High School to Bell Mountain Park on Redstone Road.

Phase II of the 12-foot-wide multi-use path will cut through Rena and Elgie Hays Green Park, also known as Hays Green, named for both grandparents.

The Hays Farm redevelopment project features more than 440 acres of preserved open space, a tupelo gum forest, ponds, lakes, and natural springs.

The opening of the trail also highlights a partnership and pro-



Pictured L-R: Bekah Schmidt, executive director of South Huntsville Main Business Association; John Kvach, executive director of the Singing River Trail; Jennie Robinson, Huntsville City Council President; John & Jimmy Hays, Hays Farm developers; and Mayor Tommy Battle

vides an opening for the developers of the Singing River Trail, a 70-mile historic bike-hike-walk trail system launched last year by the Land Use Committee of Huntsville's Launch 2035.

The ambitious legacy project will connect Huntsville to Madison, Athens, and Decatur.

John Kvach, executive director for the Singing River Trail, said it will connect people, places, and ideas throughout North Alabama along the Tennessee River.

"The partnership between the Singing River Trail and Hays Farm comes from years of hard work ...," he said. "The City of Huntsville, the Hays Family, the Land Trust of North Alabama, and dozens of individuals and organizations have worked hard to improve the quality of life and connectivity of the city

Pictured L-R: John Hays, Mayor Tommy Battle & John Kvach, executive director of the Singing River Trail



and its people.

"This is the model that SRT will use across our region and along the trail route: public and private partnerships, the blending of regional interests, and working to find solutions that bind us together to create a trail that will serve as a center of health and wellness, educational learning, and economic opportunity," said Kvach. "The Singing River Trail at Hays Farm is just the start of a green ribbon that will connect all of North Alabama."

Dennis Madsen, manager of urban and long-range planning for the City, said the greenway provides more opportunities to access and enjoy the outdoors.

"This is great for South Huntsville, but also reflects a broader, citywide commitment to developing greenways, connecting neighbor-

hoods, and improving the quality of life for all Huntsvillians," he said.

City Council President Dr. Jennie Robinson, who represents District 3, said Elgie's Walk Greenway will not only make it easy for students to safely bike and walk to Grissom High School, but provides the community access to a beautiful setting featuring woods and water in the Hays Farm development.

"It will also eventually connect to the Tennessee River via the Singing River Trail and Ditto Landing and later to Aldridge Creek Greenway on the east side of the park, providing miles of trails for Huntsville residents," said Robinson.

Land Trust Executive Director Marie Bostick said her organization worked closely with multiple City departments to see that Elgie's Walk Greenway ensures seamless connectivity.

"The Land Trust is excited to help offer connections to nature through this collaboration with the City," Bostick said. "This newest greenway creates access to another natural gem and all the benefits being outdoors can provide."

Bekah Schmidt, executive director of the South Huntsville Main Business Association, thanked the city and the Hays family for such a significant investment in South Huntsville.

"Not only do greenways enhance the quality of life of residents in a community, the new greenway at Hays Farm and the Singing River Trail's presence in South Huntsville will bolster economic and business activity in South Huntsville," she said.

This year will see further enhancements and extensions to the area's trail systems, including a design for a new two-mile greenway south of Redstone Road, connecting to the Tennessee River West Greenway at Ditto Landing. ♦

COVER STORY

State of the City Filled with Optimism, Big Announcements

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SIT DOWN WITH SUCCESS

Joey Usery: The Challenging HVAC Industry is Gellin' but It's a Slow Gellin' Process



Joey Usery, owner of Superior Heating & Air is a one of only two Carrier President's Award Winners in North Alabama and among only 200 out of 5,000 nationwide.

By Kimberly Ballard - Page 3

RETAIL

Trader Joe's Announcement Creates Excitement for Community



Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle broke the news during his State of the City Address last month: "As Huntsville's most requested retailer for the past 10 years, we are excited to officially announce – Trader Joe's is opening a new store in Huntsville."

By Bud McLaughlin - Page 10

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State of the City Filled with O

By Kimbe

Kicking off his fourth term as mayor of Huntsville, Tommy Battle delivered a virtual State of the City Address filled with optimism about Huntsville's indomitable economic resilience; praise for Huntsville's heroic perseverance and teamwork in the face of an unprecedented pandemic; and an in-depth look at multiple building projects and expansion across the city.

Battle also made two exciting announcements.

The long-awaited arrival of Huntsville's most-requested retailer, Trader Joe's, is opening in the MidCity District; and Google Fiber will debut 2 gigabit Internet service in Huntsville, making us a double-gig city.

"If 2020 were a fish, I'd throw it back," Battle said. "But Huntsville still shows strong growth in every section of the city. In fact, we have claimed the construction crane as the new unofficial Huntsville city bird, perpetually populating our skyline."

He said Huntsville entered 2020 with promise after "crushing it" in 2019 with \$1.8 billion in economic development and capital expenditures circulating through our economy; and 3,025 new jobs - new opportunities for people to improve their lives.

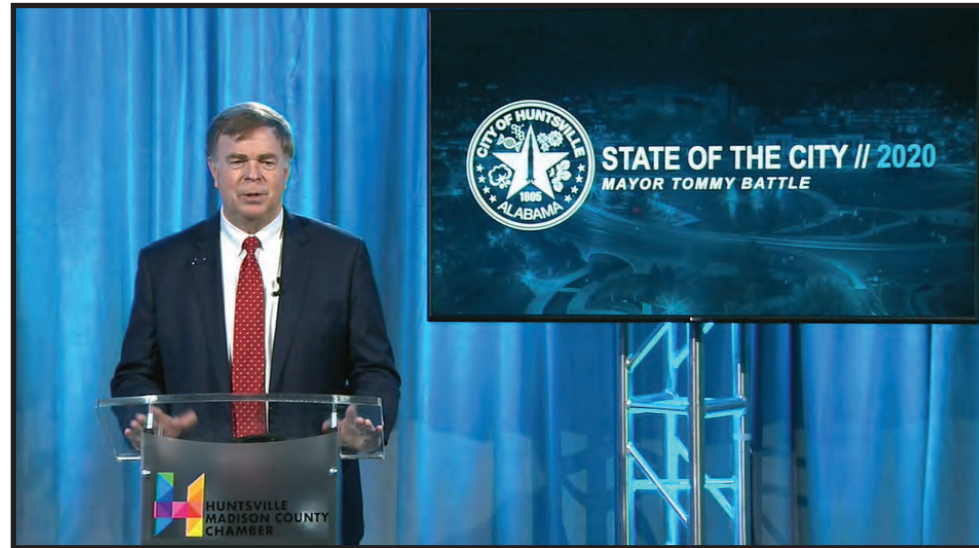
"We had \$1.9 billion in industrial capital expenditures and \$1 billion in commercial, residential, and multifamily; and that's in addition to all the expenditures that have occurred in renovations and rehabilitation projects," Battle said. "We were off to a great start as Navistar announced it would double employment through a \$125 million expansion to widen its truck portfolio; Blue Origin opened its rocket engine plant in Cummings Research Park to assemble the BE3 and BE4 rocket.

"Then it came to a screeching halt when the novel coronavirus tested our resiliency."

Huntsville's resiliency tested

But Huntsville was ready.

They leaned on experience from dealing with the H1N1 virus in 2009 and mobilized a response



Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle

team of healthcare experts, hospitals, Emergency Management, HEMSI, businesses, and government leadership.

"Huntsville knows the power of teamwork and we know the power of speaking and acting with one voice," Battle said. "We were not powerless. An educated community knows how to wear a mask. An educated community keeps a safe distance. And an educated community washes their hands, knowing there's something much bigger at stake than our own personal comfort."

Through it all, City Hall and city municipal offices remained open for business. City leaders felt it was important to be there for the people they serve at a time when so much seemed to be out of order, City Hall could be the symbol of normalcy.

"Huntsville is defined by our perseverance, our resilience, and our remarkable ability to adapt and change," Battle said. "We didn't wait for the federal government for a hand-out. Our local businesses pitched in to help and this community came together in partnership to move us forward.

"We were willing to show up for work and use new health and safety protocols to remain on task. We separated; we masked; and we sanitized.

"Telework became the norm, and Zoom became our conference room, and that is how we have been able to keep businesses open, let children

go to school, and enjoy some sense of normality until a vaccine or treatments are approved and available."

While he said area hospitality, restaurant and entertainment industries took the hardest hits, he hailed health care workers and first responders who put their lives on the line to care for others. He cited Crestwood Medical Center and Huntsville Hospital for securing test kits, PPE, and medicine. He also reassured there is a COVID-19 response team already working on a plan to distribute a vaccine when it is available.

As the pandemic raged on, Huntsville faced down the summer of civil unrest by engaging groups in dialogue about how to be a more just and equitable city that ensures opportunity for everyone.

They began restructuring the City's Office of Multicultural Affairs into the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, expanding staff to represent the community's need for law enforcement.

"I have the utmost confidence in our Chief Mark McMurray and the men and women of the Huntsville Police Department who served as officers on the front lines," Battle said. "In the past 10 years, this Department with input from our community, has led the way in police reforms with a commitment to constitutional policing, escalation techniques, implicit bias training, and a commitment to a certified mental health crisis interven-

Mayor's Wife, Best Friend Dies

Mayor Tommy Battle's wife and best friend, Eula Catherine Sammons Battle, died Oct. 20.

A Huntsville native and 1973 graduate of Huntsville High School, Eula loved her hometown and joyfully spent her life giving back to her community and had a successful 31-year career as a teacher.

As the city's First Lady and an educator, no one knew more about the importance of education to business development and recruiting than Eula.

In 2010, when the State Legislature severely cut the education budget, eliminating a \$550 stipend for teachers to supply their classrooms, Eula took action and co-founded Free 2 Teach, a nonprofit that supplies free school materials for local teachers. Eula started out by filling her garage with boxes of binders donated by local defense contractors and any other school supplies she could convince other businesses to donate. Demand for supplies grew quickly, and Eula's spunky determination proved resolute when she called on companies to contribute.

To date, Free 2 Teach has distributed more than \$7 million in supplies and materials to Huntsville-area teachers.

Eula is survived by her husband, Tommy Battle; their son, Drew Battle and his wife, Lauren; grandsons, George and Benjamin; brothers, Dr. Robert Sammons (Louise), Dr. Calame Sammons (Dianne), and Bill Sammons (Laurie); a sister, Susan Sammons Sullins (Bill); and 12 nieces and nephews.

tion team.

"Huntsville law enforcement has instituted dashboard cameras in police vehicles and body cameras on officers. Our homeless task force built community partnerships, and we have increased diversity in its ranks.

"Furthermore, a partnership be-

STORY

Optimism, Big Announcements

erly Ballard

tween Huntsville police and the FBI is funding a new state-of-the-art joint training facility with law enforcement across the region so they will receive the best training possible to keep themselves and the public safe.”

Huntsville grows throughout pandemic

And when all was said and done, COVID-19 may have rocked the country and brought momentum to a screeching halt but, despite the hit, by the end of this year and still in the midst of a pandemic, Huntsville will have created 960 jobs and put \$2.1 billion in new product on the ground in Huntsville.

“In September alone, the Inspections Department issued permits totaling \$220 million,” Battle said. “In that \$220 million was new commercial and residential construction setting a new benchmark, an all-time historic record month for the city of Huntsville in capital investment.”

Battle pointed to the projects that were already in progress and continued throughout the pandemic including the improvement and re-branding of Huntsville’s public transit system; the opening of Cecil Ashburn Drive and the movement into the final phase of widening Zierdt Road. They are continuing to widen Research Park Boulevard to six lanes; began construction on the northern bypass, as well as the final overpass on Me-

morial Parkway at Mastin Lake Road; and they will finish the Greenbrier Parkway in the Mazda Toyota area.

“To sustain this kind of growth, you have to have a plan in place and we do,” said Battle. “We’re investing in infrastructure to ensure our existing neighborhoods receive the same attention and the same upgrades as our newer developments.”

Battle talked about three greenway projects that will connect north central Huntsville to South Huntsville. Merrimack Park, John Hunt Park and the old Joe Davis stadium are undergoing improvements.

Huntsville opened a 58-acre nature preserve off Martin Road west, named in honor of the late Dallas W. Fanning, former director of Urban Development and architect of Huntsville’s western expansion.

Projects such as the Johnson Legacy Center on the site of the old Johnson High School and an adjacent residential development; the Mark Russell Recreation Center on Taylor



Road; and the Sandra Moon Community Complex are all in progress or nearing completion.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held last month for the William Hooper Council High School Memorial Park next to the downtown public library. It pays tribute to the legacy of Huntsville’s first public school for African American students and will incorporate another green space filled with public art.

More public art will appear at the new Lantana Park, a once blighted property on North Parkway that will soon house a walking trail and sculptures that will create a colorful gateway into North Huntsville.

A new fire station for the westernmost part of the city and increased infrastructure services including repaved roads and parks are ongoing.

Downtown is seeing a major expansion at Huntsville Hospital, two new public parking decks, three new hotels, and two new multi-use complexes with apartments and commercial space.

“It is urban living at its best,” said Battle.

Bring on 2021

Just west of downtown, a \$1.3 million choice neighborhood planning grant is funding a plan to revitalize and transform Butler Terrace and its surrounding area between Clinton Avenue and Governors Drive.

“Growth is really everywhere in

the city from a 400,000 square foot warehouse at SouthPoint Business Park on I-65 to projects in Haysland Square, Governors Drive, Mastin Lake, where a 140,000 square-foot high tech distribution center is being built.

“And of course with so many new people moving into the Huntsville area from across the U.S., the addition of Trader Joe’s at MidCity is a big win for the region and we are honored to finally welcome them to our community,” Battle said.

Industrial investment keeps coming as Mazda Toyota announced another \$200 million investment at the automotive plant, and Toyota’s engine plant is planning the county’s largest solar powered plant at its campus in North Huntsville.

“The city is well positioned for 2021 and we’re moving forward with a balanced budget and another year of AAA credit ratings,” Battle said. “We will use this stellar rating to fund in 2021, our new City Hall, a world class amphitheater, a new fire station for Limestone County, and many other quality of life amenities on a global scale.

“There will still be some hardships into 2021, but we will move forward with our plans and dreams – even if some of it will be in an abbreviated way - but there’s no place I would rather be in a pandemic than right here in our great city.” ♦



COVER STORY

Area Commercial Construction Continues to Rise in Wake of COVID Uncertainty

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RETAIL

Alabama Goods: Distinctive Food and Gifts Made in Alabama



What's so unique about Alabama Goods is the merchandise they carry. It's all handmade by Alabama artisans.

By Lori J. Connors - Page 2

AUTOMOTIVE

Mazda Toyota Manufacturing Makes \$830M Investment for Technology, Training Programs



Mazda Toyota Manufacturing is providing an additional \$830 million investment to incorporate more cutting-edge manufacturing technologies to its production lines and provide enhanced training to its workforce of up to 4,000 employees.

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Area Commercial Construction Continues

By Kimberly Ballard / Photos by Redstone Federal Credit Union

There has been very little, if any, slowdown in commercial building in Huntsville and Madison throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the weight of uncertainty related to the pandemic has not disappeared, commercial builders and developers continue to work through it like Marshall Space Flight Center engineers work through the challenges of the space program – always moving positively forward; always working the problem from a pragmatic standpoint; and never accepting failure as a final outcome.

According to Shane Davis, Director of Urban & Economic Development for the City of Huntsville, new construction permits, and permit inspection requests have not declined throughout the pandemic and the City continues to see strong growth in all building sectors.

“In terms of the overall environment, we continue to see multiple new projects looking at the Huntsville market as a new or expanding location,” said Davis. “While COVID has slowed the number of potential new companies and their projects, active projects are very strong and diverse in varying business sectors.

“Ongoing construction activities have been hindered by reduced workers, intermediate quarantining, and delays due to the availability in building materials. But while these conditions have slowed the overall construction pace, all ongoing commercial and industrial projects continue to move ahead with a shift in completion deadlines and openings.”

He points to the very visible and very active downtown construction happening on what seems like every block.

“City Centre is under construction with Phase II – lofts, retail, and a parking garage,” he said. “Two new public parking garages are going up at Greene and Monroe streets. Both the Curio Hotel and Hampton Inn and Suites are in the midst of construction, and the new Huntsville Hospital

Tower is taking shape.

Last year, Russ Russell Commercial Real Estate set a land sales record for downtown Huntsville at \$56 per square foot for the Hampton Inn and Suites project. Located on the corner of Clinton Avenue and Monroe Street, the land is prime downtown real estate across from the expanded Von Braun Center.

“It is one of the few corners that has been vacant with no building on it,” Russell said. “Out-of-town developers look at these parcels of land with fresh eyes and are willing to pay a premium because they can see it developed, where sometimes local people can’t because they drive past it every day.

“I set up an ugly tent with cold beer and rare velvet Elvis artwork, and you will be surprised how it brings that vision into full view!” he quips.

Mitch Coley, division Manager at Robins & Morton, said they are working on a variety of projects in the greater Huntsville area. Some of the most visible include Huntsville Hospital’s Orthopedic and Spine Tower, Redstone Federal Credit Union, 106 Jefferson, Pelham Street Park and Redstone Gateway 7100 and 8100’s new office building.

“Mid-year there was a decline in new projects and delays in projects in the planning stages as owners and developers hesitated, wanting a clearer picture of what was ahead,” said Coley. “But the industry is seeing some of these projects resuming. The good news is that those projects haven’t gone away and that’s providing strong start for next year.”

He said they are seeing a decrease in the number of new projects reported as upcoming opportunities from architect and design firms, but they believe this will manifest itself in a market-by-market and city-by-city basis. Huntsville is not likely to be as affected by what would ordinarily predict a nationwide downturn because Huntsville’s market sector is so diverse.

“Looking back at the recession of 2008, the construction industry contracted,” Coley said. “It was different from what we’re facing today because of the lack of capital during the Great Recession, but it resulted in a pent-up demand for construction.

“There was still a backlog when COVID-19 surfaced. Although some clients expressed hesitancy to proceed with projects in the very early stages of planning mid-year, we’ve seen many of them resume.”

Russell sees positive signs everywhere. From the construction of the \$40 million Autograph Collection by Marriott hotel being built to replace the southern portion of the Von Braun Center parking deck; to the long-awaited downtown Constellation development, which begins Phase I construction this fall.

In addition to these large-scale projects, downtown continues to see

new businesses opening up and the redevelopment of existing spaces in the core, Davis said.

“The biggest impact on new commercial projects and hospitality projects has been the pause in project financing,” Davis said. “We have



dozens of projects that still have approval from both the private equity and brand/retailer sides. However, COVID-19 has caused a pause in the start of construction due to the ability to close on the financial package.

“The ability for these projects to keep the private equity and national brand approvals shows the current strength of the Huntsville market.”

Don Beck, partner in The Shopping Center Group of Alabama concurs.

“The banks are lending money and it is cheap,” said Beck, whose company specializes in retail developments. “Bankers know the Huntsville market is good because its employment base is there with federal dollars coming from Redstone Arsenal and subcontracting coming from Cummings Research Park. With the jobs there, the banks are a yes for lending.”

On the other hand, many banks are showing hesitancy toward some restaurants and hotels.

According to Joey Ceci, president of the Breland Companies, “We have several cases



STORY

Businesses to Rise in Wake of COVID Uncertainty

Union, Robins & Morton, and The Hollingsworth Cos.

where regional hotel and restaurant owners are ready to move forward but in those two industries, it is almost impossible to get financing, despite their financial statements looking fine. Accessing capital is very important to companies that are expanding so this has been a deterrent.”

Outside of downtown, Davis points to growth and the success of other commercial projects throughout the region.



SouthPoint Business Park, off Interstates 65 and 565 and five miles from the Mazda Toyota Manufacturing plant, broke ground on its 11th facility at the 1.9 million square-foot industrial park that is already home to six companies. The new building is the region’s largest spec industrial facility and, according to Davis, it is almost full.

SouthPoint is a component of the larger regional economic strategy, and Davis calls out regional leaders and partners for that expansion, as they continue to focus on the bigger picture and work to be successful in those areas.

“Cummings Research Park remains the location of choice for big business,” Davis said. “Several entities have plans for expansion and the city continues to invest in new and updated infrastructure as part of implementing the updated Master Plan. Even with the COVID events, projects are in the works for 2021 and we believe will be a big year for CRP.”

At MidCity, construction slowed due to COVID, but retail, hospitality, and the initial multi-family components are still on schedule to

start construction this fall.

“Most of the infrastructure construction, site grading, and utility relocations are wrapping up such that the redevelopment plan can go vertical,” said Davis. “We believe 2021 will be an exciting year for MidCity as the building architecture that has been shared through the Master Plan will come to life.”

One of the worst kept secrets in Madison County is all that red clay

moving around at the corner of Town Madison Boulevard and Zierdt Road.

The newest Huntsville Starbucks location and Outback Steakhouse are moving forward, while Town Madison continues to build a retail center across the street from Toyota Field. The buildings are 50 percent complete and will welcome a chef-driven Italian restaurant to its tenant line-up.

“Economic development continues to be a primary focus for our Madison team,” said Madison Mayor Paul Finley. “Our YTD sales tax is up over 10 percent from last year despite the COVID-19 situation, and we continue to see success in growing our retail sales tax base.

“Town Madison, Madison Boulevard, The Avenue Madison downtown, Midtown, the Highway 72 corridor, and County Line Road have all seen growth in restaurants, retail, and groceries,” Finley continued. “Redevelopment of Hughes Plaza, Madison Boulevard and Hughes Road all continue to give Madison an upgraded, new and positive look.”

“Retail follows rooftops,” said Beck of TSCG. “The good news is that Huntsville is still growing; we

still have a housing shortage; we still have over 10,000 jobs coming into the area; and there is still a lot of demand, even pent-up retail demand.”

Beck, who has developed many retail projects throughout the region, said he is positive about the future as he sees developers moving towards mixed-use projects with a housing component and perhaps an office of medical office component fitted together with traditional retail.

“We are still seeing expansion downtown and on the south part of town with the Hays Farm development,” he said. “Scottsboro, Athens and northern Madison County, Hazel Green and Meridianville are showing continuous growth.

“Athens, for instance, is getting a second Publix where the old Kmart used to be. With its proximity to the interstate and Toyota Mazda, Athens is a great commuting city for Huntsville and Madison, and it should soon see a boom as it grows together with Madison.”

He also said smaller towns such as Hartselle and Priceville are seeing growth as well because the commute time to Huntsville or Madison is workable.

“If you moved here from Atlanta or (Washington) DC, you have an entirely different perspective on commutes,” he said. “And it is less expensive to live in those smaller towns.”

The disconnect he said is with forced reduced sales volumes. Can retailers justify the construction costs and afford the rent?

“We don’t know the answer to

that yet, but at some point, business must open back up and people have to get back work,” Beck said. “There’s no way these restaurants with construction costs being where they are, can at 50 percent capacity and a limit on the hours you can sell alcohol, justify new construction costs.”

He said while rent must go down, at the same time, landlords have mortgages and they have to make mortgage payments. The good part is that developers and landlords are being creative in finding ways to make it work.

“On pre-COVID leases, landlords are working on rent deferrals or rent reductions where the tenant pays partial rent for the time being, and when things get back to normal, going back to full rent and perhaps adding a longer lease time, like an extra year on the lease.

“As long as there’s housing demand, retail will be all right, but we also don’t yet know how the Amazon effect will affect big box retail,” he said. “There are still a lot of people who want to shop in stores. Shopping is a social event just like going out to play golf or tennis. But throughout this pandemic, Amazon has filled that space and we don’t know yet how much that convenience will carry over into everyday life once things get back to normal.”

Coley too said there is still a lot of uncertainty, but his company Robins & Morton believes most people are hopeful that we will gain control over the pandemic in the not-too-distant future.



“When you think that it can be two years or more from planning to completion for a project, you can understand why a lot of active construction hasn’t slowed down,” said Coley. “You’re always building for the future, and I think that’s what we’re seeing here in Huntsville.” ■

COVER STORY

Madison County Housing Market Booms Despite Pre-COVID Shortages

Page 8

DEFENSE

Dynetics Brings Hypersonic Weapon Technology to MidCity



Weapon modernization is the Army's No. 1 priority and, in these ever-changing and dangerous times, troops need to be combat ready.

By Lori J. Connors - Page 5

RETAIL

Stovehouse's Gaslight Alley: Not Your Parents' Retail Center... But Maybe Your Grandparents'



From its humble early factory beginnings, the Stovehouse has transformed into a fun, casual destination to enjoy live music, along with a wide assortment of dining and beverage options. There's also retail, fitness, and office space, boasting an array of amenities.

By Lori J. Connors - Page 12

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Madison County Housing Market Booms

By Kimberley

Before the coronavirus pandemic, the only things obstructing regional residential growth was the construction industry labor shortage and a desperate shortage of housing inventory.

Still during the pandemic, there is nothing – at least nothing new – slowing the residential housing market in North Alabama. Not a virus, not consumers, not builders, not banks, not regulation, and not the economy.

On the contrary, homebuying and homebuilding are both booming.

“We have sold more homes in 2020 than were sold at the same time in 2019,” said Josh McFall, CEO of the Huntsville Area Association of Realtors. “Even amid the stress of a pandemic and busy housing market, there was no slow down and, in fact, the only thing the association has seen take a downturn is housing inventory.

“I don’t even think we can classify the inventory problem as directly related to the pandemic. Beginning in January, we reported the lowest number of homes available for sale in the MLS since the MLS has been keeping track of those records in the mid-1990s.

“Madison County has been the big driver of that because we have the most MLS listings due to the denser population. Inventory is low, but we consistently slide down the entire MLS because our average days on market has also slid down.”

He said the days on market for North Alabama is 42 days but, in Madison County, that number is 26 days and consistently falling.

“I remember five years ago we were reporting 80 or 90 days on the market and here in 2020 and during a pandemic, as of June that number is 26 days,” he said. “So, we had this



housing shortage before COVID.”

Last month, around 840 homes were sold in Madison County. Of those 840, some 600 were resales and 230 were new construction. The 230 are either new construction, a prospect build that was sold, or a custom build that entered the MLS.

“So, what we are saying is, more builders are feeling more confidence in the local economy, so they’re ramping up their building, while at the same time, they have a lot of pressure on them due to the labor shortage and rising supply costs,” McFall said.

“But if you look at all the MLS to date, there were 2,307 available homes on the entire market; 926 are in Madison County.”

One-third of houses under construction sell every month so the industry must build a lot of houses to keep up with demand, he said.

“Sales prices are continuing to tick up from month to month so you can see it is a supply and demand issue,” said McFall.

How are

people feeling about buying or building a home during a global pandemic? Apparently, completely unfettered.

“Buying a home during COVID-19 was almost no different than our previous purchases,” said David Fields. He and his wife Meredith bought a home right around the highpoint of the pandemic this spring. “Our Realtor was very supportive and took all the necessary precautions including the use of PPE and social distancing. Overall, it was a great experience!”

“We’re getting lots of activity on the housing side of our business,” said Joey Ceci, president of the Breland Cos. Breland’s commercial division is developing the 525-acre Town Madison off I-565.

“At Pike Place at Clift Farm off Balch Road in Madison, we already have several townhouses built and sold,” Ceci said. “At Town Madison, they are getting calls from people who are downsizing and who want to get away from a large yard and out from underneath the maintenance of a large house.”

While Breland builds a variety of housing products, they also contract with other homebuilders such as Regent Homes of Nashville. Regent built homes at the Village of Providence and is building The Heights District at Town Madison.

Ceci said all Breland develop-

ments, whether they are cottages, single-family homes, or townhouses, are continuing to go up all over North Alabama, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Developments such as The Ledges of Oakdale in Athens, Meadowbrook in Cullman, and The Retreat in Meridianville are selling quickly, while Pebble Creek at River Landing in Madison is sold out.

“The impact on the economy with all these houses being built and sold are keeping home values up for existing homeowners,” Ceci said. “It’s good for our local economy too to be able to say we are not just swapping houses.

“We were pretty sure all these people would be moving here to take jobs with the FBI and Mazda Toyota, and now they are here. There are a lot of new people coming into the area.”

Stone Martin Builders, which has developed Celia’s Garden, Allen Acres and Copper Creek in Huntsville, has also continued to build throughout the pandemic, according to Sales Manager Ashley Durham, despite hurdles caused by supply shortages and subcontractor delays.

“The labor shortage is the building industry’s greatest challenge currently and it has a direct impact on low inventory,” said Durham.

One of the ways they are addressing the problem is to build strong relationships with subcontractors to help them grow their companies alongside their own.

“As a growing company, Stone Martin Builders finds value in helping our business partners grow and become great so we can in turn, overcome all types of industry challenges together,” Durham said. “That in addition to seeking opportunities with local technical programs to enhance the workforce, we are all helping each other.”

One of those technical programs is the North Alabama Homebuilding Academy started by the Huntsville Madison County Builders Association to address the problem. The academy has already graduated its second class - during the pandemic.

The North Alabama Homebuilding Academy trains people to be a homebuilder. Upon graduation, they can work as a contractor in training or in one of the ancillary trades. It was an 18-month endeavor but since



STORY

Home Demands Despite Pre-COVID Shortages

Erly Ballard

January, the academy has graduated 47 students.

According to Barry Oxley, Executive Officer of the HMCBA, the gap in skilled construction and construction-related labor goes back 30 years to the No Child Left Behind Act when school systems retooled education.

“There was, for a long time, the idea that you have to go to college to be successful and as schools began to do away with trade school classes, a stigma developed around trades that said you were not meant for college,” said Oxley. “But the construction industry is made up of a lot of small businesses. If you are a skilled plumber, electrician, window or flooring installer or masonry expert, you do quite well.”

The academy’s focus is on the 30 percent of school kids who are not able or do not want to go to college.

The program is an eight-week session with a cap of 18 to 20 students. The fourth session started in early July with 19 students and every class through September is booked to capacity.

“We have been talking about the labor shortage for a long time, so we decided to do something about it,” said Oxley. “They apply through our website and we invite them to an open house. We have been doing those virtually since the shutdowns started.

“We send them an invitation to sign up for a class. It does not cost them anything to attend and we back up the classes with ongoing job fairs where we bring in employers who hire our students. These students are going from minimum wage jobs to making \$14 to \$16 an hour.”

“We will always strive to build homes efficiently and with great quality ... and we will continually seek to find growth opportunities for our organi-

zation in the North Alabama market to help offset the housing shortage,” said Stone Martin’s Durham. “We are still accomplishing this goal and our customers remain positive.

“We keep them informed of any affects the pandemic will have on the construction process, and there has been very little disruptions in our builds, so customers continue to be eager and excited about their new home.”

Durham believes it is the commitment her company made to colleagues, customers, and the building team to support one another throughout the crisis. The minute COVID-19 began to challenge the building industry, Stone Martin Builders acted.

“We identified fellow business owners that may be negatively impacted by the pandemic, and we found ways to become their patrons,” she said. “Many of these business owners were Stone Martin buyers, and we believe it is our duty to give back when we have the ability to do so.”

Some of the steps they took included renting tents from an event resource company whose events had been cancelled.

“To offset their losses, we used these tents for outdoor closings and information-gathering stations to offset the cancellation of open houses in North Alabama,” she said. “Our goal was to find ways to use the product of a struggling customer to help offset the struggles we were having.”

Durham said some of the processes with customers also changed.

“Upon our first meeting with a customer, we seek to understand the ‘Why?’ they are building a new home,” she explains. “COVID changed that process slightly in that we now need to understand how a homeowner is going to function in their new home.

“COVID is requiring the home be multi-functional and that looks different for every homeowner.”

For instance, they see an increase in the need for home offices, quiet rooms for schooling or reading, func-



tional kitchens with people cooking at home more, and good natural light for being home in day time hours.

“We are creating home plans that meet those needs,” said Durham.

“We continue to see high demand for housing in Madison County, and especially in Madison,” said Madison Mayor Paul Finley. “The city instituted a Growth Impact Committee in 2017 that documented inventory and anticipated growth. Using this data, the Madison School Board, supported by the City Council, defined 12 mills as the proper number for managing this growth via the property tax referendum.”

The mill rate is the amount of tax payable per dollar of the assessed value of a property.

“This passed in September 2019 and we are now building the needed schools to manage the growth,” he said.

To support this managed growth, the Madison City Council formulated and instituted a Growth Policy in mid-2019. Town Madison’s residential growth was factored into the Growth Impact Committee’s study and they continue to build out both the residential and retail portions.

A new townhouse development on Kyser Boulevard is an example of how managed growth can work for all parties.

“The developer focused on providing 366 townhouse units on industrial property,” Finley said. “Our growth policy dictated that the only way we would change this zoning was if significant city objectives were achieved.

“Working with the developer and schools, we defined two significant objectives: connecting Westchester Road to Kyser Boulevard allowing school buses a more direct and safer route to Sullivan Street; and extending the Bradford Creek Greenway from Palmer to historic downtown. These two objectives are estimated to cost \$4,000,000 and will now be built and paid for by the developer.

“The developer also agreed to spread the building out to eight years with a 50-unit maximum per year and will not include second stories or a swimming pool, keeping their focus on non-school age purchasers.”

McFall said Huntsville construction is rebounding from housing remnants of the 2008 Great Recession.

“If you think back 10 years to the recession, Huntsville was not hit as hard as some places, but some of the bigger builders either scaled down or consolidated,” said McFall. “You may notice tracts of land still sitting empty in the back of neighborhoods that were built out for new homes in 2009 and 2010.

“Now they are exploding because builders have bought them. You can drive all over town and see construction in neighborhoods where one builder built the homes in one section of the development, but another builder is completing it.

“The bottom line is people need a place to live, whether they are moving up or moving down. Marry that with the best interest rates seen in the mortgage industry in a long time, it explains the good housing numbers.



COVER STORY

The COVID-19 Endgame: Probing Questions Will Remain with a 'New' Economy

Page 8

COVID-19

HudsonAlpha's Dr. Neil Lamb Talks Treatments and Vaccines



Dr. Neil Lamb from HudsonAlpha joined the Huntsville-Madison Chamber of Commerce via teleconference to better explain where the medical profession and science is regarding finding treatments and vaccines for this terrible strain known as COVID-19 – an acronym for coronavirus disease of 2019.

By Kimberly Ballard - Page 6

TECHNOLOGY

Despite Increased Teleworking, Huntsville-Areas Internet Integrity 'Among the Best'



West Coast researcher BroadbandNow published a study of the top 200 U.S. cities based on population regarding Internet performance and the numbers say Huntsville is "among the best."

By Mike Easterling - Page 12

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The COVID-19 Endgame: Probing Quest

By Kimber

Huntsville is accustomed to goal-oriented missions.

When it was determined that our health care system could be overwhelmed by a surge in COVID-19 patients, Madison County residents and business owners took unprecedented steps to follow state and federal guidelines for social distancing. They closed their businesses and sheltered at home to help flatten the curve against exposure to the virus.

Under all discernible yet cautious reporting, COVID-19 cases seem to be waning and our hospitals seem to be buffered against the threat.

Mission accomplished. Goals achieved.

But this mission is different from any other.

At what costs have we seen success? What does an economic recovery following this pandemic look like? When will it occur? How long will it take to get back to “normal”? Will there ever be a “normal” or will it change us forever?

These are the questions posed to Dr. Wafa Hakim Orman, associate dean for undergraduate programs at the College of Business and associate professor of economics and computational analysis at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

“Economically, things are very bad right now,” said Orman. “The problem is our normal indicator models don’t do us much good because they are monthly or quarterly.”

For instance, the national labor force is around 164 million. Before the pandemic started, unemployment was about 3.5 percent.

Today, the B&S rate shows national unemployment at just over 4 percent, but Orman believes the numbers are skewed and that rate is closer to 13 percent because it is based on March in which half of the month was great, but the last half of the month was disastrous.

“We need more timely indicators to truly see what is going on with the current state of the economy, and weekly unemployment claims are the best data we have on the subject right now,” she said.

The Madison County labor force is about 186,000. In Madison County last year at this time, based on figures from the Alabama Department of Labor, we had about 203,000 unemployment claims per week. Since March 15, nearly 16.8 million people have filed unemployment claims at a rate of over 6 million per week.

“In February (before the pandemic-related shutdown began), it looked really good for us,” Orman said. “The unemployment rate was only 2.7 percent, which was below what we consider our normal unemployment rate, and here in Huntsville, it was lower than the state average.”

To put this into proper context, Orman said, you must do some back-of-the-envelope mathematical calculation.

“Based on these figures,” she said, “The unemployment rate for Madison County is probably already over 8 percent and nationally, the true unemployment rate is probably over 13 percent.”

Compared to the financial crisis of 2008, this is off the charts. Even when compared it to the Great Depression, unemployment was very high, but the fall-off was gradual, not all at once.

“The country has never seen anything like it. It is completely unprecedented,” said Orman. “There are

however some alternative indicators available if we look for them and one of those is electricity demand.

“The Department of Energy provides hourly indicators on electricity demand and you can tell if commercial establishments are shutting down because electricity use will be lower. Based on up-to-the-minute indicators provided by University of Chicago economist Steve Cicala, electricity use has plummeted, and this information has been adjusted to allow for temperature, weather patterns, and holidays.”

Electricity demand should be at the February average of 2 percent. After March 15, it dropped precipitously to nearly minus-8 percent.

“I did a similar analysis for the areas covered by the Tennessee Valley Authority, because that’s the smallest

scale at which we can get this electricity data for our region, and the results are very similar,” she said.

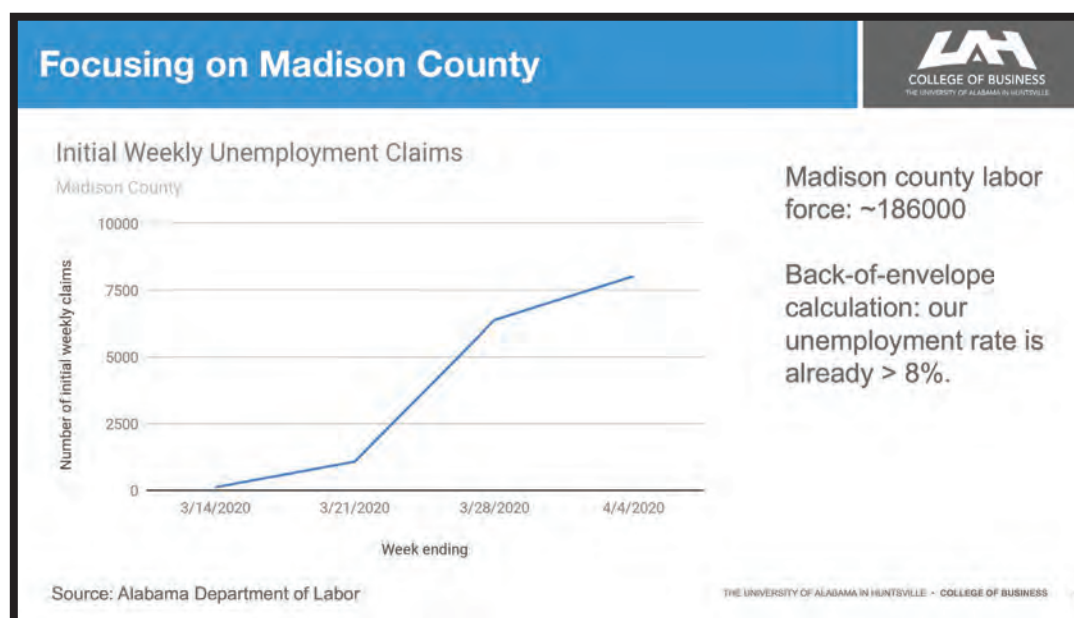
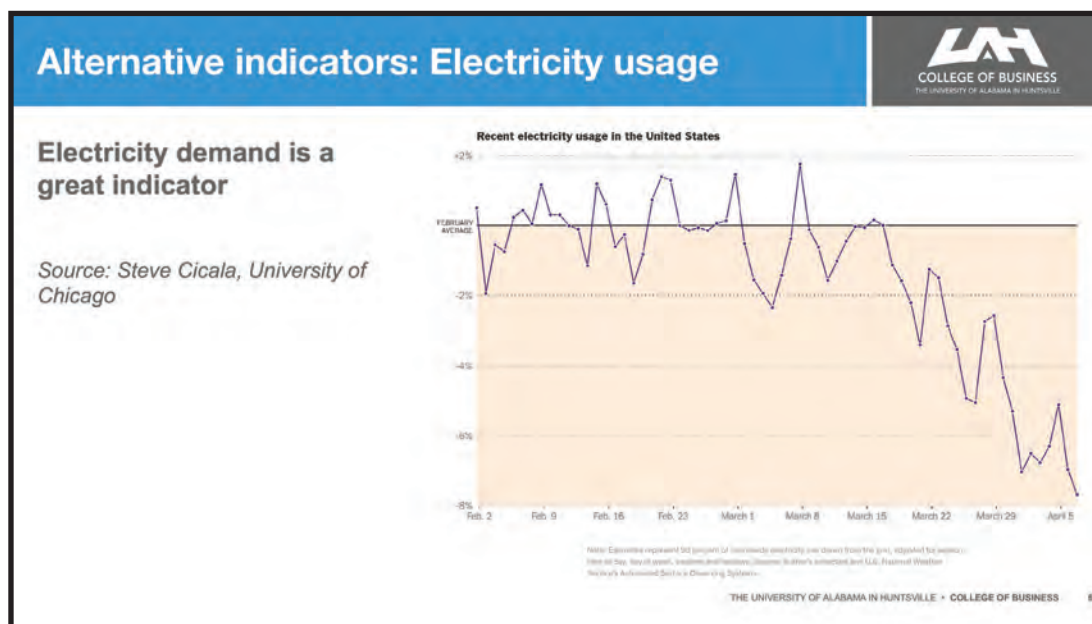
Another alternative source of data comes from Homebase.com.

“They provide timesheets and scheduling software and they have very helpfully made aggregates of what they’re seeing available on their website,” Orman said. “You can see the impact on local business from their customer base looking at hours worked. Again, we see a sharp decline, and when you look at it by industry, this provides us with something I think we should be paying a lot of attention to as we think about reopening.”

Orman said the industries that are seeing the biggest declines are likely to be the industries people will be the most reluctant to go back to after reopening.

“As an economist, what we have is essentially a major shock to aggregate demand,” she said. “And it creates this tension. We need to save lives by shutting down, but we also face terrible consequences from the economic shutdown. Increases in unemployment, increases in poverty, and all the negatives we know are associated with recessions, are really intensified in a very short time right now.”

While the number appears to be flattening the



STORY

Jobs Will Remain with a 'New' Economy

by Ballard

curve and social distancing seems to have been a successful strategy for slowing the spread of the virus, the long-term effects are unknown.

Orman however presents some ideas for discussion.

"And it is completely implausible that we just wait for some bell to ring that tells us the virus is no longer a threat," she said. "That is impossible. It will have to be a phased reopening but how does that unfold?"

She said a slow, limping back to normal over a prolonged period is difficult to assess at this point because if the economy reopens to some non-essential businesses, there is a risk of another spike in infections and that will be bad news that affects further openings.

And there are yet other considerations equally as concerning.

"What businesses will people actually go back to and what businesses are likely to continue to suffer, even after we reopen," she said. "Looking at data from Homebase.com, home and repair and transportation don't involve much contact so people will probably be quite happy to see those reopen."

Orman believes there will be some pent-up demand with people stuck in their houses for a couple of months. They will want to go to a restaurant, buy things they have been needing or wanting, take a hiking trip, go camping, or attend a social gathering at a local venue. People will be able to get a leak in their roof fixed or plant their spring garden, but what about professional services?

She points out it may be awhile before people are comfortable with touching gym equipment someone else has been using; getting a manicure, a massage, or even a haircut because it requires a lot of personal contact with another person.

"And what about the food and beverage industry," she asks. "We're talking about opening restaurants, but they will have to deal with capacity. They still will not be able to employ as many workers as they did before, leaving some unemployed."

During the pandemic, automation and teleconferencing has replaced

in-person contact and has prompted serious questions.

Since many industries have been using self-checkout counters and teleconferencing software as a back-up, how many jobs will be lost to fully-automated services? How much business travel will be cut in lieu of online meetings? How many office jobs will move to telework?

There is also a question mark concerning education.

"Students are being forced to adapt to online learning, including elementary school and kindergarten," Orman said. "Those that can move online, have done so, but education at the lower grade levels such as kindergarten through 12th grade may be online this semester. What happens to other educational activities like after-school programs, sports, tutoring, music, and extracurricular activities like summer camp?"

"How long will it be before people are comfortable sitting in a crowded movie theater, attending a concert, or other events that involve large numbers of people in one place?"

She will not be surprised if relatively high unemployment remains for a while as people don't get rehired such as teacher's aides, personal trainers, and extra restaurant workers. Some businesses such as hair stylists, manicurists, and massage therapists won't reopen because there is not enough demand to be profitable.

Orman said at that point, unemployed workers will continue to be a drag on GDP.

"By fall, that's starting to get far enough in the future that although difficult to predict, I think the best we can do is an optimistic scenario and a pessimistic scenario," she said.

"In the optimistic scenario, our healthcare system can put in place widespread contact tracing and widespread testing, so if someone is diagnosed, we treat them and everybody they've been in

contact with. Those people are quarantined but everybody else can go back to normal.

In that scenario she said it is also possible to develop the so-called herd immunity - that once enough people have the coronavirus, it is not such a problem anymore.

"Most businesses open, and we can realistically hope hiring and spending start to increase," Orman said. "This is happening in China where they are experiencing a V-shaped recovery for manufacturing that's taking off but again, tourism and personal service industries are much, much slower."

In the pessimistic scenario, she said, we do not yet have widespread contact tracing and testing and the virus spikes back up. In this scenario, it will be like the 1918 influenza that started out relatively mild in the spring of 1918, then surged with a vengeance that fall.

"Pandemics and epidemics have throughout history, resulted in big long-term changes to society and I wouldn't be surprised if we don't see the same with this one," said Orman. "And how soon economic recovery takes place depends on what American society is willing to live with."

That requires compliance.

"This is a free country," she said. "We prize our freedoms, so will we submit to required testing on a regular basis, or being told you need to be in quarantine because of someone you've been in contact with has contracted

the disease and you need to be quarantined for two weeks, even if you're not feeling sick?"

"I think some people will and some people won't. Initially there will be a strong sense of public spiritedness so people will comply, but eventually people will get tired of it, so compliance will probably be an issue."

And will widespread mask-wearing make sense, and will people comply with it?

Orman said it's hard to see how it won't become standard at this point, but how will people feel about it in the long-term?"

Orman shared three very telling images from China after they reopened their economy.

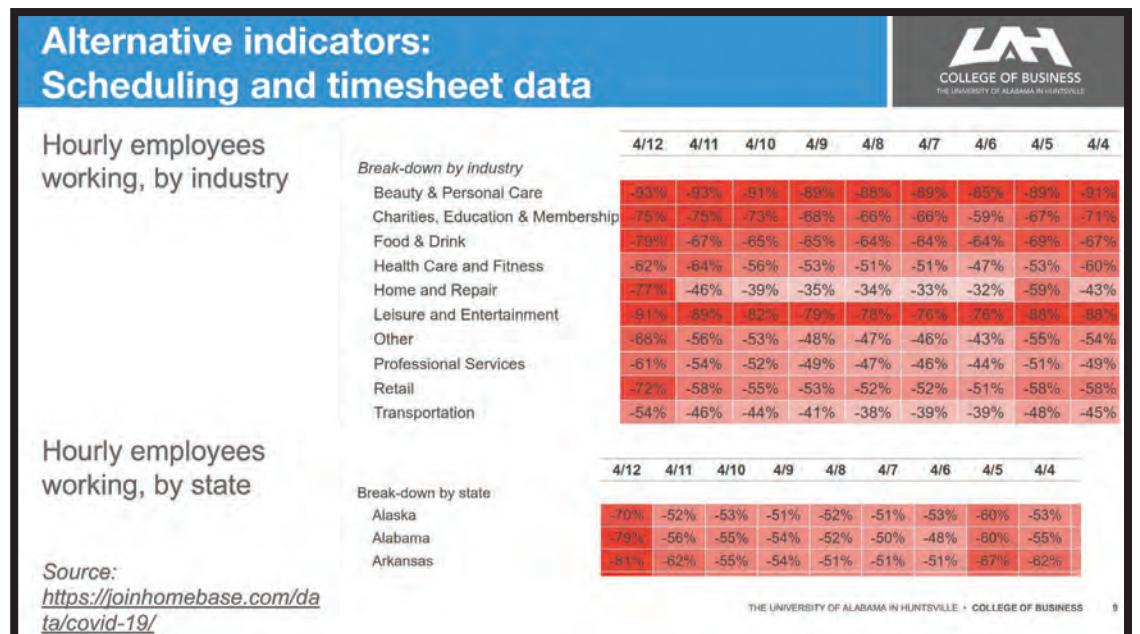
The differences are stark of Chinese factory workers maintaining six-foot social distancing while enjoying lunch looks more like an image from a prison.

One image shows a sparsely populated subway in Beijing with passengers sitting six feet apart in a car that is usually very crowded.

And perhaps the most telling picture of all - a wedding, where aside from the bride and groom, everyone in the wedding party, including the photographer, are wearing masks.

After seeing these images - to what extent are people going to be comfortable with this and for how long?

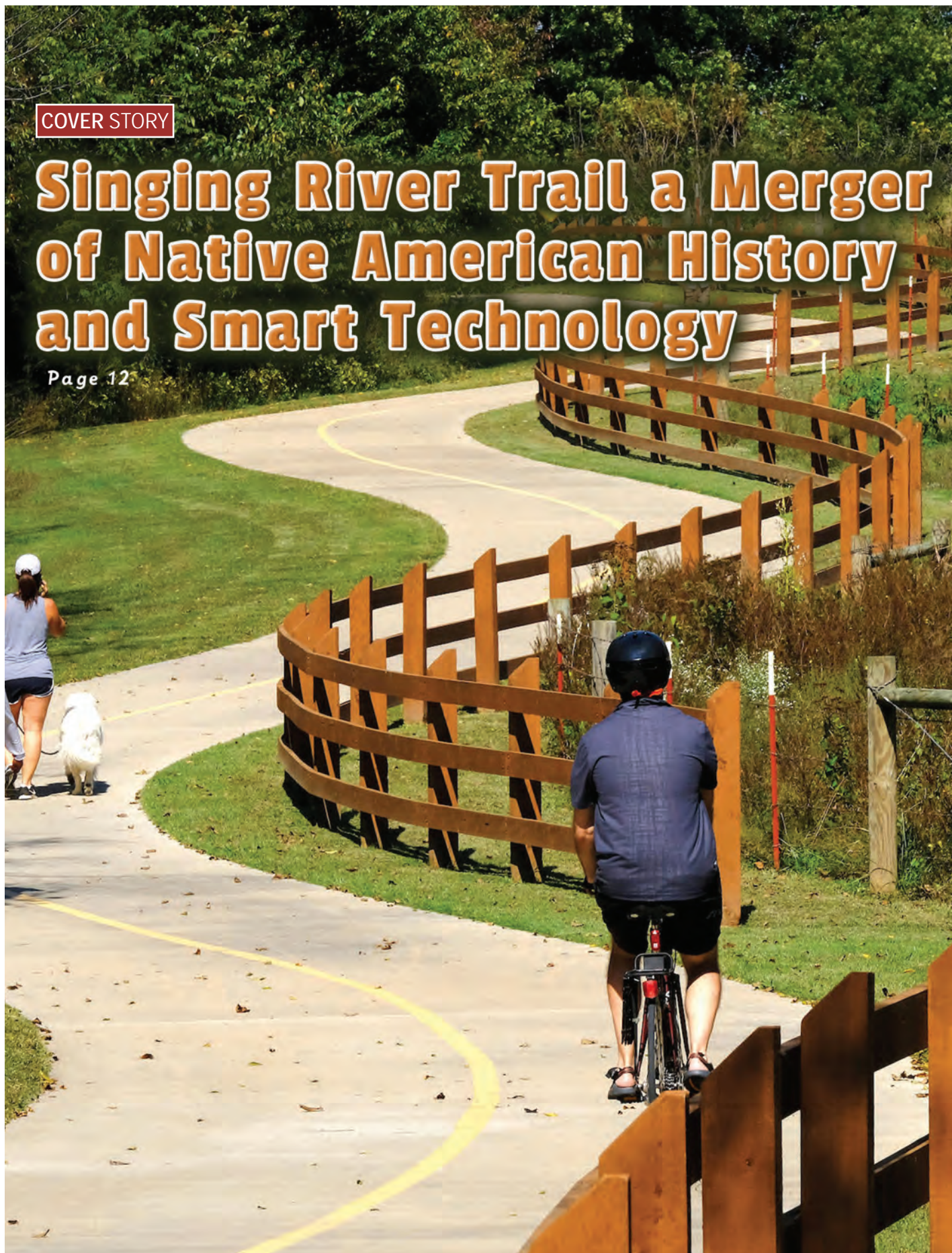
"These are still the probing questions," Orman said. ♦



COVER STORY

Singing River Trail a Merger of Native American History and Smart Technology

Page 12



SMALL BUSINESS

Leigh Christian: Grantwriting Powerhouse is Catalyst's New Project Manager



Leigh Christian recently took the helm as project manager for Tech Rich Program at the Catalyst Center for Business and Entrepreneurship.

By Lori J. Connors - Page 3

FOOD / DINING

Mario's: A New Face in a Familiar Place with Same Attitude



There's a brand new eatery in an old familiar place with the same eclectic vibe for residents of Five Points in east Huntsville.

By Mike Easterling - Page 14

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Singing River Trail a Merger of Native A

By Kimb

Native Americans called it the “River that Sings” and many tribes were said to use the Tennessee River to “sing” their dead into the afterlife.

Two hundred years was not that long ago in the grand scheme of history and, in 1819, Creek and Cherokee tribes lived up and down

the river leaving behind a rich legacy in places where rockets and genomics, missiles and cyber security now dominate.

The past and the future are coming together in a historical and high-tech way as the Land Use Committee of Huntsville’s Launch 2035 debuts the first quarter mile of North Alabama’s 70-mile-long Singing River Trail along Governors House Drive in Huntsville.

In what is one of the most ambitious legacy projects Launch 2035 has undertaken, the Singing River Trail project hit a major milestone last month debuting a \$225,000 master plan funded by municipal and county governments, regional businesses, and congressional officers. The plan by Alta Planning + Design lays out a 70-mile bike-hike-walk trail that will physically connect Huntsville to Madison, Athens, and Decatur.

Fully embracing the Native American heritage, the plan reveals a route starting at Bob Wallace Avenue in Huntsville. It will follow Madison Boulevard and bear south at Zierdt Road to Triana, crossing over County Line Road to Mooresville. Another leg will bear north off Madison Boulevard toward Belle Mina, and dip south to the river at County Road 6 crossing into Decatur. On the Decatur leg, it will turn north along U.S. 31 toward Athens.

Although it is expected to shift in some

places, especially along U.S. 31, the master plan reveals a trail that will offer estimated economic benefits of \$10,890,000; transportation benefits of \$866,000, and health benefits of \$1.4 million.

It will also offer \$23,631,000 in indirect economic spending; \$7,079,000 in earnings from direct economic spending; and provide approximately 900 temporary and 100 permanent jobs per year.

“We see the master plan as the first milestone in this legacy project,” said John Allen, CEO of Huntsville’s Committee of 100, the backbone of the Launch 2035 effort to forge a coalition between city and business leaders in Madison, Morgan and Limestone counties. Their purpose is to build an economy that is inclusive of communities across the entire region that benefits the entire region.

“Land-use planning is one of the three legs of the stool on which Launch 2035 has its focus. If you look at Huntsville regionally, the Tennessee River passes through all three counties and four major cities.”

Joe Campbell, legal counsel

for Huntsville Hospital, is on the Launch 2035 Land Use Committee. He had been working on a connectivity idea for the Huntsville and Decatur campuses of Calhoun Community College.

They had discussed a trail or bike system that would connect the two campuses, making him the perfect person to spearhead an expansion of that concept to include the bike-hike-walk trail that connects the entire three-county region.

“I have been amazed at the response,” said Campbell. “Everyone we talk to says ‘Yes.’”

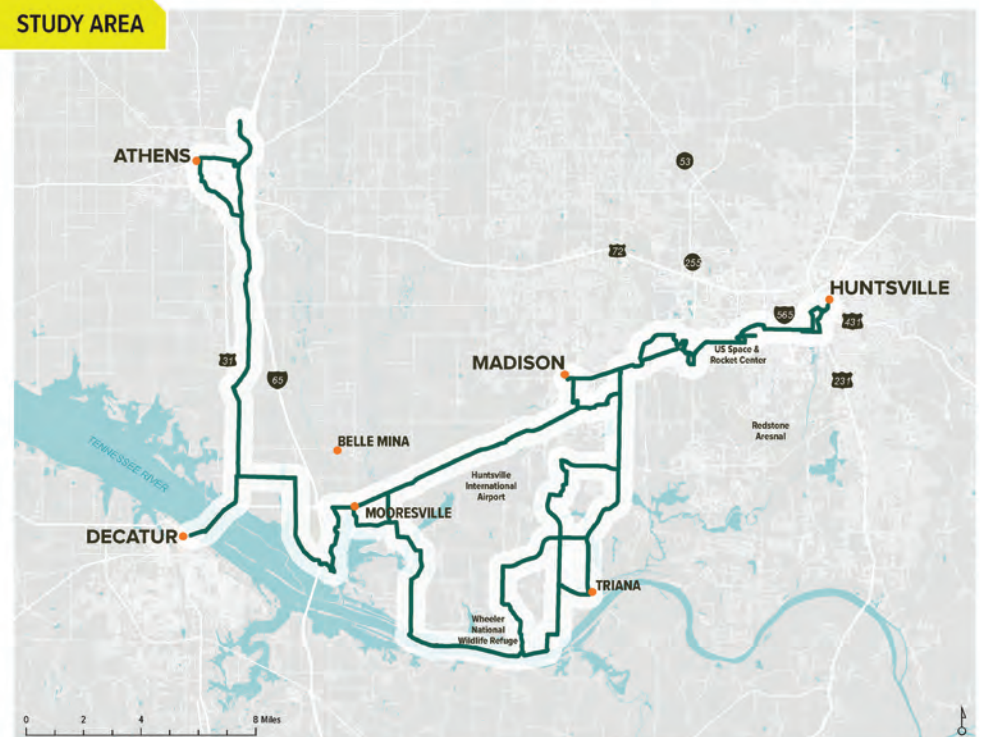
One of those yeses is the Smithsonian Institute.

“One of our law partners came to our firm from having worked for the Smithsonian institute,” Campbell said. “Upon talking to her, she put John and I in touch with Kevin Gover, director of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian.

“She mentioned they have a storehouse of American Indian artifacts and said if we were to do a Native American museum along the trail, there was a chance the Smithsonian would be interested in



STUDY AREA



STORY

American History and Smart Technology

erly Ballard



loaning us all sorts of exhibits for it.

“John and I were stunned to be honest, when we met with him, thinking we needed to convince him that what we wanted to do would be beneficial to the museum. But instead, his response was that this may be the kind of venture the Smithsonian had been looking for. They have been wanting to take the Smithsonian outside of the four walls of their building and take it to the people!”

Campbell said Gover brought up possibly incorporating the Trail of Tears into the project.

“He suggested we set it up as a smart trail. Pinpoint sites that were part of the Trail of Tears, that were heavily populated villages along the way, or that held historical significance,” Campbell said. “If we do that, the Smithsonian would provide exhibits and facts from those events.”

Campbell said he and Allen came away excited about the possibilities, able to envision a technologically advanced digitally-enabled walking and biking trail where people are listening on their headphones to historical recordings that tell the story of the area at different locations, along with signage

and exhibits where they can stop and take in what occurred there.

Another consideration is to have sensors and other technology that warns walkers and riders. For example, because of recent rains, a specific route through the Wheeler Wildlife Refuge was too wet. It would then recommend a different route. This would be helpful to people planning out a 20- or 50-mile route.

Allen agrees that in terms of funding, nearly everyone they talk to loves the idea and they already have sponsors in all aspects of business from Huntsville Hospital to the TVA and Rotary, banks, colleges, and more.

“The trail also has health benefits that are part of our workforce retention programs,” he said. “It’s not just something our community has to have as an amenity to keep workers here, it’s something to do that’s cool, attractive and a magnet for our talent pool.”

The city was about to authorize the building of a new car bridge and Campbell said they stepped in and negotiated putting in a bike lane.

“They did it and will consider it for any future roads as well,” Campbell said.

“When you look at the economic impact, you realize how it will change the dynamics of communities along the route,” he said. “For instance, I pitched the idea at a quality of life panel at a chamber leadership meeting and afterward, a commercial developer on an economic development panel wanted to talk to me about the restaurants they’re trying to bring in. He wants to discuss where the trail will run because for some clients, it may be more feasible to locate on an off-road location you can access by bike or walking than along a five-lane high traffic area in town.

“I did a presentation to the Rotary Club about it and they have taken us on as their five-year project.”

Allen said the question became, “How are we going to manage that from a municipal perspective?”

They started with looking at other successful trails as a baseline for what the Singing River Trail could be.

One of those is the 62-mile

Silver Comet Trail that runs from Smyrna, Ga., outside Atlanta, to the Alabama state line where it connects to the Chief Ladiga Trail, winding for 33 miles through the countryside to Anniston.

They have also studied the Razorback Regional Greenway, a 38-mile off-road shared-use trail in northwest Arkansas; and the Wolf River Greenway Trail from Memphis to Germantown, Tenn. It is much shorter at only a little over 7 miles.

Decisions about the trail’s width, whether to pave it or use crushed gravel, who will maintain it, and providing security are all still in the planning stages.

“We’ve had the National Park Service at the table talking about these things,” said Campbell. “But you know different parts of it will be under different jurisdictions so each community will be responsible and will have to step up.

“Right now, our target is to get it on the ground.” ♦





COVER STORY

Huntsville's Burgeoning Regional Economy Part 2: Right-Sizing Lifestyle with Quality of Life

Page 12

SPACE

Marshall to Lead Lunar Lander Program with Huntsvillian in Charge



NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine delivered some welcome news last month to the Marshall Space Flight Center.
By Bud McLaughlin - Page 6

SMALL BUSINESS

26 Local Businesses Make Prestigious Inc. 5000



More than two dozen local companies have landed on this year's version of the Inc. 5000 list, the most prestigious ranking of the nation's fastest-growing private companies.
By Bud McLaughlin - Page 15

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Huntsville's Burgeoning Regional Economy Pa

By Kimberl



Recently, Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle shared his vision for Huntsville in terms of an average sized pie. He, along with business owners and civic officials, stood at city center – what Battle calls Huntsville's "living room" – and looked out in every direction to the edges of the pie's crust.

What they see are active growth corridors ushering in a significant expansion of the original Huntsville pie, which is accelerating economic growth throughout the North Alabama region.

"Instead of dividing the pie into fifteen different pieces that get smaller the more users you add, we made the whole pie bigger so we could divide it up differently with more restaurants, entertainment and activity venues, more places to spend retail dollars," he said. "With a bigger pie, each slice is more valuable."

The success of Twickenham Square, a multi-use development built right in the heart of downtown Huntsville's medical district and anchored by The Artisan luxury apartments and a Publix, has spurred the development of four more multi-use (multi-purpose or mixed-use) sites in the downtown area.

These developments require the right balance of residential, retail, and commercial space, usually surrounded by a pedestrian-friendly traffic pattern, walking trails and/or parks, and plenty of amenities and activities.

Sealy Realty's Avenue Huntsville (and the new Avenue Madison); CityCentre at Big Spring with the new AC Hotel by Marriott; the long-awaited Constellation, breaking ground this fall on the old Heart of Huntsville site at Clinton Avenue; and a new development by Rocket Development Partners on the former site of the Coca-Cola plant on Clinton Avenue across from the VBC are either already established or coming soon to downtown Huntsville.

"People ask whether mixed-use/multi-use developments are replacing traditional malls and shopping centers," said Battle. "But I think you have to look at each one individually. People are looking for more live, work, play types of environments,

but I think what we are seeing today is a shift. Is it permanent? Probably some of it is, but I won't be surprised to see it shift back."

Max Grelier, co-founder of RCP Companies who developed the AC Hotel as part of CityCentre, as well as MidCity on the old Madison Square Mall property, agrees.

"Retail centers are not dead. They're just changing based on consumer behavior," he said. "Old-style retail centers still play a role in our communities. A good 'convenience' style retail center is needed to support suburban neighborhoods.

"However, retailers across most retail center formats are shrinking their footprints and using technology and distribution to keep up with the trends and competition."

But Battle points out that many online retailers, such as Duluth Trading Company who have been online-only retailers, are building mortar-and-brick stores like the one they opened at Town Madison in June.

And even online behemoth Amazon is now putting stores throughout the U.S.

"I just got back from Nagoya, Japan where they still have huge department stores that are very active because people want to look at what they're going to buy, touch it, experience the kind of cloth it's made of and see how it fits," Battle said.

"When you look at Parkway Place, they are doing very well, and we recently added an apartment component to Bridge Street Town Centre to add a 'live' component to it and Research Park's work and play.

"But when you look at the old Madison Square Mall, it could be found on a site called DeadMalls.com," Battle said. "We built a lot of malls back in the 1960s and 1970s – probably too many. I think we are now right-sizing back to what we need. There's still a place for pure shopping like Parkway Place, but I say you need both to succeed."

Charlie Sealy of Sealy Realty has developed several residential properties including The Belk Hudson Lofts and The Avenue Huntsville, which also has a retail component in downtown

Huntsville.

Sealy is also building Avenue Madison that will have a retail and parking component in downtown Madison. He said the trend for new developments will be weighted more toward multi-use developments in the future.

"However, the older style shopping centers and malls won't be replaced anytime soon unless they are old, obsolete, and really in need of replacement anyway," said Sealy. "These [mixed-use] developments are definitely what residents and consumers prefer now because of the experience they produce."

Grelier said the mixed-use developments come in a variety of styles.

"These developments are a type of urban development strategy that blends residential, commercial, cultural, institutional, and/or entertainment uses to initiate more consumer interactions by creating walkable, livable, and experiential communities," said Grelier. "Mixed-use developments can take the form of a single building, a city block, or entire districts.

"Traditionally, human settlements have developed in mixed-use patterns; however, with industrialization of the U.S., as well as the invention of the skyscraper, governmental zoning regulations were introduced to separate different functions, such as manufacturing, from residential areas."

Joey Ceci, president of The Breland Companies, which is developing Town Madison and the new Clift Farm project on U.S. 72 in Madison, sees it differently.

"I think we are seeing the death of the super-center more than malls," said Ceci. "Those centers with huge parking lots and a row of big box stores lined up next to each other – for one thing people just don't like that huge parking field and, two, from a developer's standpoint, if something happens and a business closes or moves out, it is very difficult to repurpose that huge space left behind by a store the size of Target or TJ Maxx. You can use a big box space for a trampoline center or an entertainment

MidCity aerial photo by David Cooper, EQB View



STORY

Part 2: Right-Sizing Lifestyle with Quality of Life

by Ballard

center, but you can't put a restaurant in there.

"Multi-purpose developments are making that space work better by integrating residential into it via restaurants and everyday neighborhood retail like a dry cleaner or hair salon. The idea is to take the new urbanist movement that everyone is following and make smaller blocks of space so that if, in 20



years, that block is no longer viable, knock it down and put something else there. It's a matter of making it more sustainable over time."

Sustainability is the focus at Town Madison where Madison Mayor Paul Finley is looking to more than the casual Rocket City Trash Pandas fan to help build out that development.

He's getting some help from travel sports and softball/baseball recruiters and scouts who will enjoy the regional draw of the new Pro Player Park, just off Wall-Triana Highway.

"The new Pro Player Park and everything Town Madison offers will definitely get foot traffic to our hotels; however, workforce development secures regional success which will also help us locally in aspects of infrastructure and schools," said Finley.

Finley also points to the success of the Village at Providence, one of the area's very first mixed-use developments built in 2003, as an example of how popular pedestrian-friendly mixed-use communities have become.

"A mixed-use development offers a live-work-play experience right outside of your front door," said Finley. "This is appealing to young professionals, established mid-lifers, and retirees alike. These developments are multigenerational that attract businesses to the area."

"Mixed-use developments are replacing declining malls because they are often well-located within a region that affords them premium access and site metrics," said RCP's Grelier who is striving to make the old mall property economically viable again. "When this is the case, there is typically strong demand for several multiple property types such as hospitality, residential, office, restaurants, and retail.

"Single-use commercial centers are becoming more difficult to sustain given changing consumer behavior related to online shopping, and demographic trends focusing on experiences rather than traditional brick-and-mortar shopping."

However, Grelier said when they purchased the old mall property in 2015, they had a strategy ready for MidCity.

"We began working with the city and Urban Design Associates (UDA) to create a mixed-use project that would meet market demand and help reverse the decline of the West Huntsville commercial corridor," he said. "We also had a broader, more aspirational strategy in collaboration with the city to use the MidCity District as regional economic growth tool by addressing the 'next-generation' workforce demand in Cummings Research Park."

Grelier said they engaged nationally known market research consultants to perform third-party market studies to guide them in developing programming for a proper balance of uses.

"We used the information from the studies to collaborate with the City and UDA to produce a complete district business plan that would maximize regional draw by creating diverse layers of use and programming at the property," Grelier said.

"Much of the emphasis is on highlighting our local cultural assets and identifying destination venues like TopGolf, public parks, and an amphitheater to establish a foundation around art and culture."

He said this is now happening through connections with Huntsville's and Muscle Shoals' regional music legacy to bring a world-class 8,500-capacity amphitheater to the development.

"We believe the amphitheatre will be very successful and play a vital role in the elevation of the region as a place you want to live," Grelier said. "There's a strong demand for weekend entertainment so the music initiative happening in North Alabama will not only keep locals from traveling to spend in nearby markets, it will attract more weekend tourism to our region."

Sealy said there is a strategy involved in where they build these mixed-use developments as well.

"These developments are really a

long-term strategy in the sense that consumer preferences are shifting this way, so we are building for what is more popular now and appears will be more popular in the future," he said. "... We are trying to draw certain people and jobs from other cities. These developments are a recruiting tool and regional draw when we are competing against bigger cities for the same talent.

"Some people, particularly millennials, desire this type of environment for living or work, so we need them to attract that population ... They will spread through the regional area, but they need a certain density of people to work, so they will be concentrated in the growth corridors where the population and jobs are the largest."

And, now, there is something for just about everyone.

"You hear people say, 'Huntsville has some pretty cool breweries downtown, I can have some fun on Friday night, go see a baseball game, spend the night, go shop at Bridge Street, play some TopGolf, and get brunch at Stovehouse on Sunday,'" said Ceci. "It makes us a lot like Chattanooga – a kind of weekend destination where people say, 'Wow! Huntsville is a great place to go for the weekend. There is always something to do.'"

Sealy said the mixed-use strategy is rewarding.

"I enjoy working on mixed-use projects because there is a huge emphasis on architecture, walk-ability, streetscape," said Sealy. "The multi-use developments are a bigger challenge, but it is a rewarding creative process."

Battle said the revitalization of one area pays benefits to the entire city.

"The Live, Work, Play strategy has always been our city plan," said Battle. "Revitalize one area using the profits of another area we have revitalized and watch the spread of that revitalization until eventually the whole city is revitalized from one end to the other in every direction." ♦

Town Madison aerial photo by David Cooper, EQB View



COVER STORY

Huntsville's Burgeoning Regional Economy En\$ures Everyone a More Valuable Slice of the Pie

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GOVERNMENT

Governor Boasts Broadband Access in Alabama Update Address

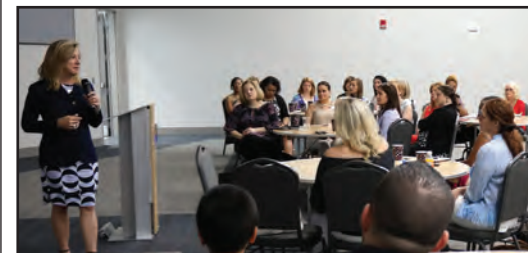


While Huntsville may be the center of high tech in the region, there are thousands of residents without access to basic broadband services.

By Jonathan Stinson - Page 5

ENTREPRENEUR

LSINC CEO Alicia Ryan Connects the Dots



For a female CEO in that environment, the challenges are multiplied. For LSINC CEO Alicia Ryan, learning from strong women helped her meet those challenges.

By Lori J. Connors - Page 19

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Huntsville's Burgeoning Regional Economy Ens

By Kimber

Envision Huntsville as an average size pie.

Standing at city center, look outward in all directions toward the far edges of the pie crust – north toward the state line where visitors from Tennessee get their first glimpse of the city. South where many Huntsville businesses draw daily commuters. East across the mountain, west from neighboring communities and all points in between.

For Huntsville and Madison city leaders, this vision of the pie's edge does not represent boundaries but, instead, corridors of growth.

"That's always been our vision for Huntsville's future and the basis for our regional economic strategy," said Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle. "The first part of revitalizing your city is to take the center point, known as the living room of your city, and revitalize it to make it economically viable. Get one area going and stretch it out to other areas.

"Year after year, we have pinpointed growth corridors that help us grow both economically and residentially. The result is an economic revival like what you have been seeing in Huntsville and Madison the past 10 years."

Private investment land developers have that vision too. During the 1990s, brothers Jim and John Hays and their nephew Jeff Enfinger of Enfinger Development opened a growth corridor to the southeast in Hampton Cove and the Hays Nature Preserve.

In 2000, that development led to the expansion of a residential growth corridor along Taylor Lane in Big Cove, and, by 2010, it had extended into the Goldsmith-Schiffman community.

Also during the 1990s, Huntsville opened a residential growth corridor off Zierdt Road in the Edgewater and Mountain Brook communities southwest of the city. In 2010, it expanded into the Williams community further south.

Battle said that by looking at the local economy like a pie, you will see their strategy unfolding.

"Instead of dividing the pie into fifteen different pieces that get smaller the more users you add, we made the whole pie bigger so we could divide it up differently with more restaurants, entertainment and activity venues, more places to spend retail dollars," he said. "With a bigger pie, each slice is more valuable."

The Western Corridor

The Town Madison development along I-565 between Zierdt Road and Wall-Triana Highway in Madison will open a gateway to the city.

Anchored by the new Rocket City Trash Pandas baseball stadium, the development is surrounded by residential, retail, commercial, and entertainment components that have thrown open a west side growth corridor that never existed.

"The location off I-565 is perfect catchment for a broad audience across the Southeast," said Madison Mayor Paul Finley. "As the interchanges off the highway are completed, you can expect ease of traffic getting to and from the area.

"If people come for a game or event, we hope they stay and experience all that Madison has to offer, including our historic downtown that offers livability with local boutique shopping and dining."

Finley also believes Madison's central geography in North Alabama positions it perfectly to feel the positive impact from economic development in the whole state as well as southern Tennessee.

"Madison benefits from Huntsville's growth with the FBI and other tech development workforce to our east, as well as from the Mazda-Toyota plant to our west. We look to collaborate with Limestone, Morgan and Marshall counties," said Finley.

The development is envisioned to become a regional destination.

"Right on the interstate, convenient if you are coming from Cullman or Decatur, and where everybody who passes by can see it," said Joey Ceci, president of The Breland Companies, which is developing Town Madison and the new Clift Farm project on U.S. 72 in Madison. "We are creating a regional destination with baseball, a food hall, and resort style hotels, similar to, but more diverse than Chattanooga."

Open Southern Border

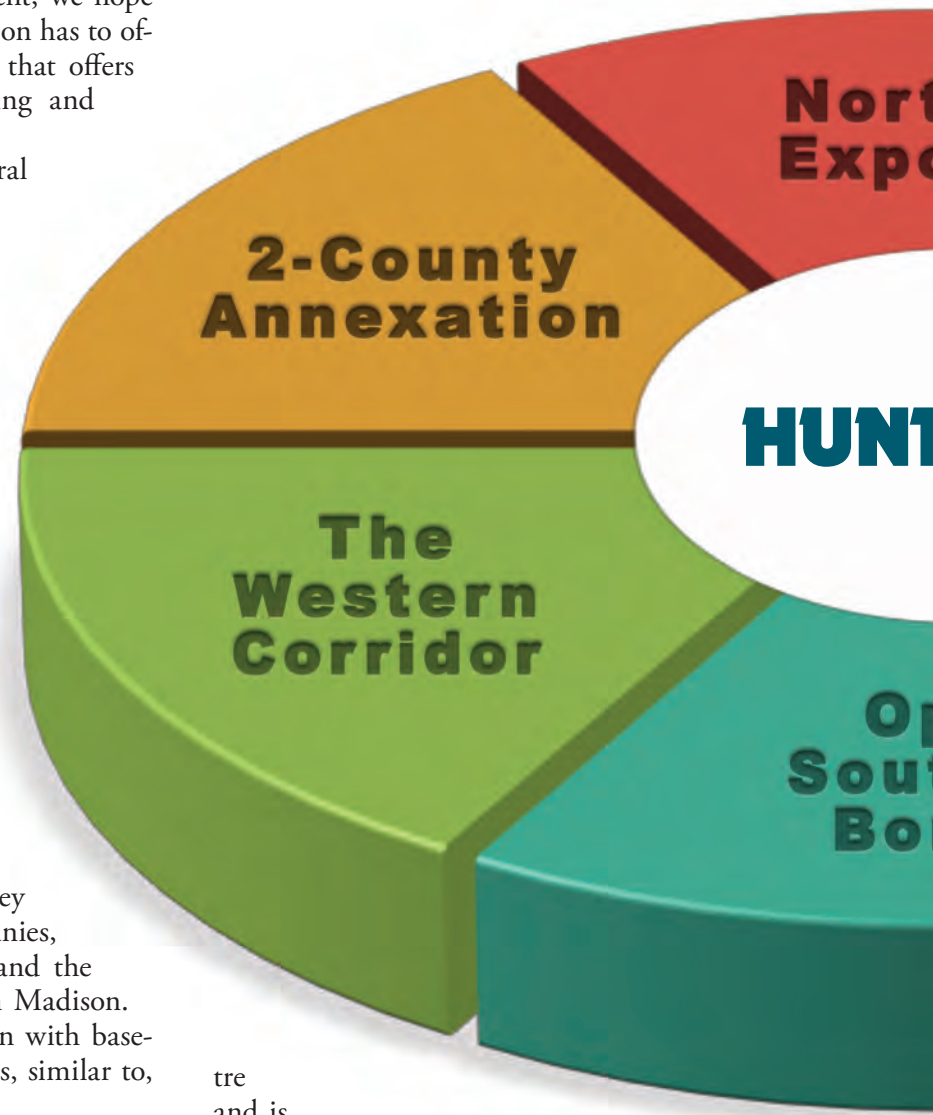
Recently, Enfinger and his uncles who are also developing McMullen Cove, announced the development of a multi-use Hays Farm development in South Huntsville that will replace the old Haysland Square and turn a 500-plus acre swath of undeveloped land into a new growth corridor to the south that will draw retailers and residents from Airport Road south to the river and beyond.

"There will be a commercial center all the way up to the Enfinger Building on South Parkway with a Village of Providence-type entertainment district surrounded by a city park, a ballfield, and 500-acre Hays Green with a passive walking park," said Enfinger. "We'd like to maintain the natural green spaces. The Hays Nature Preserve in Hampton Cove has been a regional draw for a lot of people."

In many ways, Ceci believes that with population growth and so many people commuting here to work every day from other counties, we already have an active regional economy at work.

"You see workers buying groceries, going out to eat and shopping during the workweek, even if they live outside the city," he said. "I think there is some pent-up demand for some of the development that is occurring."

Max Grelier, co-founder of RCP Companies who has developed the AC Hotel as part of City-Cen-



tre and is developing MidCity on the old Madison Square Mall property, has been watching those employee migration patterns into Huntsville for more than a decade.

"We see the regional trade area as about 50 miles and incorporates the 14-county commuter hubs from which Redstone Arsenal and Cummings Research Park draw its employment," said Grelier. "As a result, Huntsville has become the region's primary center for healthcare, civic, cultural, shopping, and dining activity."

Annexation of Morgan & Limestone Counties

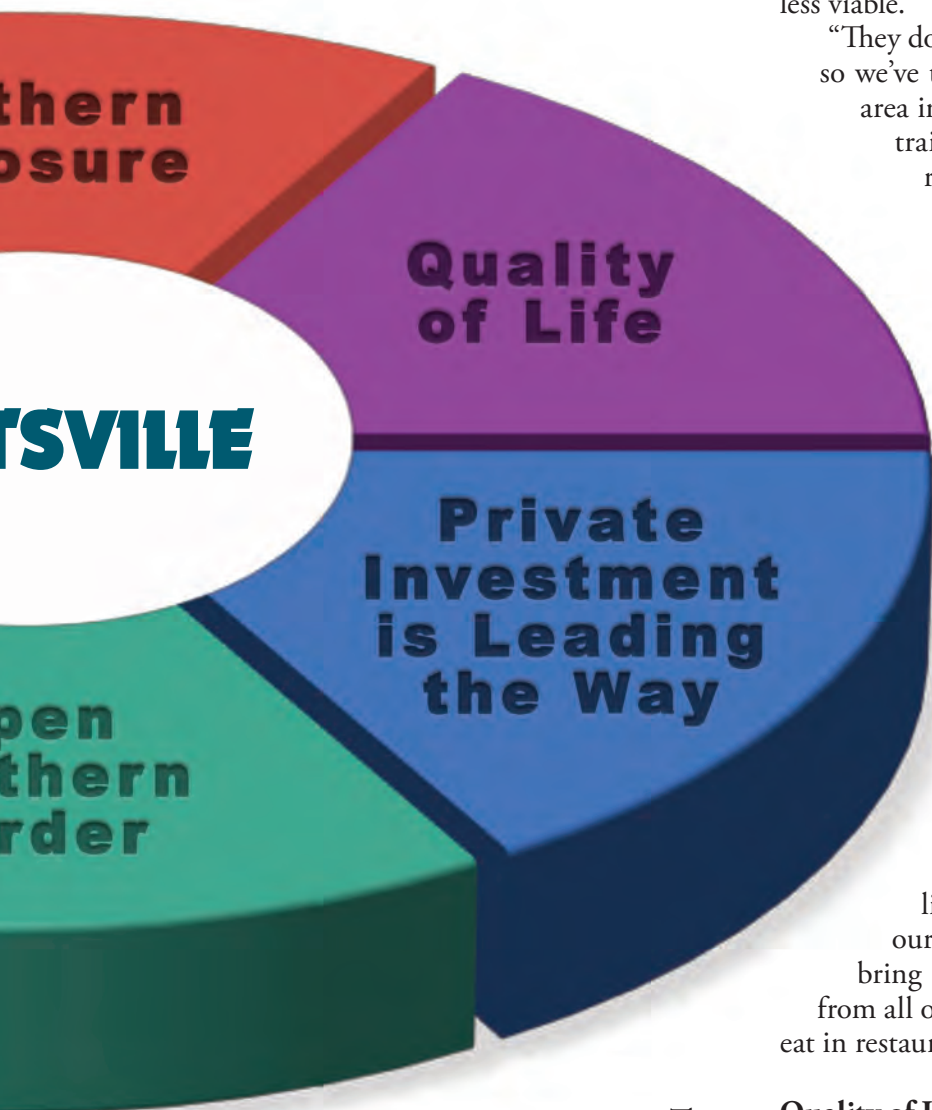
Add to all this, the annexation of a small portion of Morgan County to the southwest and a huge chunk of Limestone County due west of city center, and you can see the pie expanding!

"Yes, this annexation is a game-changer because it results in the ability to get infrastructure to certain areas and thus create major employment opportunities," said Charlie Sealy of Sealy Realty. His company has developed several residential properties including The Belk Hudson Lofts and The Avenue in downtown Huntsville, and is building a sister community, The Avenue Madison. "These new jobs will be an economic driver for the economy and create an incredible multiplier effect."

STORY

Ensures Everyone a More Valuable Slice of the Pie

by Ballard



less viable.

“They don’t have enough depth to sustain retail, so we’ve taken them out and we’re turning that area into a park with greenways and walking trails,” said Battle. “Perception becomes reality.”

“Instead of seeing boarded-up buildings when you enter from the north, you see it more as an entryway into North Huntsville - an economically viable area to move into and to be a part of.”

Among the projects is the upgrading of parks that will be instrumental in bringing in sports teams from all over the Southeast, including recreational rugby fields and soccer fields that can also be used for lacrosse.

“We are putting money into the tennis center and into the golf course, which now has cross-country running and mountain bike trails. All of these things tie back to what we call ‘quality of life’ for our residents and activities for our guests,” said Battle. “Travel sports bring people and their families to our area from all over, where they compete, stay in hotels, eat in restaurants, and shop in our stores.”

Quality of Life

Town Madison’s \$12 million Pro Player Park project with 12 synthetic baseball/softball fields, the \$22 million Huntsville Aquatic Center, and the expanding Huntsville Tennis Center are already national attractions for travel sports competitions and events.

“To have a viable and growing economy, we have to offer a ‘quality of life’ that attracts people to the area, and quite frankly, we have a lot of jobs on the table too,” Battle said. “To recruit highly-skilled, higher income workers requires a quality of life that is equal to or higher than where they are moving from.”

Battle said “quality of life” is found in Lowe Mill, in craft beer, in a vast array of recreation facilities, disc golf, pickleball, art museums and public parks.

“But we still have work to do because people are coming from around the world to work for companies like Blue Origin, Facebook, Aerojet Rocketdyne, and Mazda Toyotas,” said Battle.

Madison Mayor Finley is ready for whatever challenges lay ahead.

“As Madison grows our focus is making sure we are responsible with our citizen’s tax dollars by improving infrastructure and providing a good quality of life in every district of our community,” said Finley. “While areas to the West are experiencing booming growth and increased traffic, we need

to not only keep pace with growth but foresee areas that will need improvements down the line.”

Huntsville is also adding hotels, apartments, and homesites as more people move into the city. With a goal of adding 1,000 hotel rooms within walking distance of the Von Braun Center, Battle said it will help draw larger conventions and business meetings.

“Part of the strategy for building smaller hotels instead of one big convention center hotel is to prevent people from living inside the hotel the whole time they are here,” said the mayor. “We want people to experience our city, eat in our restaurants, visit our museums, and shop in our stores.”

Enfinger believes that as we become a more affluent society, people’s wants, and expectations become more demanding.

“It looks like we are evolving in unison with the rest of the country as far as the type shopping we do and the kind of developments we build,” said Enfinger. “Our growth rate is higher than most cities, but I think we follow a national trend in the type developments we can sustain.”

Private Investment is Leading the Way

Private investment must still lead the way and developers such as Breland, RCP, Sealy, and Enfinger are leading the charge.

“When the City can support infrastructure needs or improvements, private investment can take those dollars further,” said Mayor Finley. “This is a win/win for both the City and for the investors. Ultimately, our citizens also reap the benefits of this growth and development.”

“Buy-in is good so far, but much harder than it may seem,” said Grelier. “Huntsville has a great story to tell, but many larger institutional investors are not aware of it or view the market as too small.

“Our team spends most of our time discussing and selling the regional market rather than the immediate project. A big part of Huntsville’s growth moving forward will be how the region is branded to compete for private investment and workforce internationally. It’s a regional story that should include our sister communities.”

He would also like to see the Gen Y & Z workforce move to the area because it’s a cool, fun place to live, and then find a job once they get here rather than moving here for the great job.

“Once this trend reverses, larger private investment and more economic development will follow quickly,” Grelier said.

From the city’s perspective though, Huntsville’s first mixed-use/multi-purpose development at Twickenham Square in 2014 has been a driver in enlarging the pie. ♦

Join us for Part 2 of our series on Huntsville’s growing regional economy in the September issue of the Huntsville Business Journal as we investigate how multi-purpose/mixed-use developments are helping build Huntsville’s regional economy.

The annexation is a precursor to the economic development that follows it, said Grelier.

“Annexing was necessary for the economic development of the Toyota-Mazda plant and other larger manufacturers,” he said. “It’s also helpful in attracting investment into commercial real estate projects across the metro area.”

“We’ve only made a foray into Morgan County,” added Mayor Battle, “The annexation of Limestone County where Mazda Toyota made a \$2 billion land investment has seriously expanded our metro and opened an industrial growth corridor that is a win-win for both parties.”

City funds, thanks to Huntsville’s AAA credit rating from the S&P and Moody’s Investment Services, have pulled its share of the weight. With the power to borrow \$85 million for city and county-wide projects, of that, Huntsville will allot \$25 million for the Mazda Toyota project infrastructure; and another \$55 million for capital plans and schools.

Northern Exposure

Included is the revitalization of North Memorial Parkway. Since widening the well-worn highway into a viable parkway traffic corridor, it has encroached on many properties there, making them

COVER STORY

Wherever You Go and Whatever You Do, May the Luck of the Irish Be There With You!

Luck is an integral part of life and prosperity in the Irish tradition but the phrase “Luck of the Irish” is an American expression and not an Irish one.
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C'est Mardi Gras! Laissez le Bontemps Rouler

Mardi Gras, aka Fat Tuesday, has gone well beyond its Gulf Coast start and is spreading its bead-laden roots throughout the United States.
Page 8

Mardi Gras Mask and St. Patrick's Day hat photos credit: Shutterstock.com

REAL ESTATE

Strong Local Economy Makes Shopping Centers of Attention



In a reflection of investors' confidence in the Huntsville area economy, four shopping centers were recently purchased, according to Newmark Knight Frank, a commercial real estate advisory firm.
By Bud McLaughlin - Page 4

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Great! Huntsville is Growing... But Where Will We Get The Skilled Labor to Sustain It?



It is a quintessential “Good News, Bad News” story: Huntsville and Madison are growing.
By Kimberly Ballard - Page 10

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STORY

By Kimberly Ballard

Wherever You Go and Whatever You Do, May the Luck of the Irish Be There With You!



Special thanks to Keegan's Irish Pub for allowing photography of delicious drinks

If all you know about St. Patrick's Day is shamrocks, leprechauns, and Lucky Charms breakfast cereal, you might be surprised to learn there is an economic message wrapped up in all that ádh mór coming your way March 17.

This year, the 42nd annual Ellen McAnelly Memorial St. Patrick's Day Parade will draw 1,500 participants and more than 40,000 onlookers along the downtown Huntsville route, bringing a lot of "green" to merchants in its path!

May your pockets be heavy, and your heart be light, may good luck pursue you each morning and night - Irish Proverb

Luck is an integral part of life and prosperity in the Irish tradition but the phrase "Luck of the Irish" is an American expression and not an Irish one.

According to Edward T. O'Donnell, an author and professor of history at Holy Cross College, the phrase took hold during the California Gold Rush in the second half of the 19th century when many of the most successful and famous gold and silver miners were of Irish and American Irish descent.

There is little doubt that at least a little bit of luck has been involved in growing St. Patrick's Day celebrations and Huntsville's St. Patrick's Day Parade into one of the city's most popular holiday celebrations over the years.

Ellen McAnelly moved to Huntsville in 1977 from Galway, Ireland. Wanting to introduce authentic Irish tradition, culture, food, and hospitality to North Alabama, she opened Huntsville's first Irish restaurant - Finnegan's Pub - at 3310 South Memorial Parkway and the following year, she started what was known for many years as the Huntsville St. Patrick's Day Parade. The short route followed a southerly path along the west side frontage road of Memorial Parkway, ending at Finnegan's.

McAnelly died in 2009 and, shortly thereaf-

ter, the parade moved to downtown where it was renamed in her honor.

"The Huntsville community really lost a landmark when Finnegan's closed in 2013," said Anya Douglas, president of the Irish Society of North Alabama and the parade director. "A lot of people met their spouses there, accepted marriage proposals, and conceived children after a night of fun at Finnegan's."

"The original patrons recall many special occasions and events occurring at the original Finnegan's Pub."

May the road rise up to meet you; may the wind be always at your back - Irish Blessing

"That first year, there were 18 people in the parade and almost no audience," said Sonnie Hereford, one of the first and only remaining parade coordinators from 1978. "There are only 17 people in the picture taken for the newspaper that day because one of the participants had skipped work and he was afraid if he showed up in a picture in the paper, he would get fired!"



Photo provided by Sonnie Hereford

"The funny thing about the history of the parade is that it grew in popularity and size almost exclusively because it had been mocked as the smallest St. Patrick's Day Parade ever."

The parade took another big hit just days before the 1997 event when then-Huntsville Mayor Loretta Spencer denied the group a permit because of a series of fender benders in 1996 allegedly caused by drivers on the Parkway gazing down on the parade marching along the frontage road.

At the last minute, they received an invitation to move the parade to downtown Madison where it had

its largest participation and audience yet. For that one year, it was called the Madison County St. Patrick's Day Parade.

Everybody's Irish on St. Patrick's Day - Anonymous Irish Saying

"The parade is community inclusive even if you are not Irish," said Douglas. "It is free to participate and free to attend but it brings a tremendous amount of business to the downtown area including shopping, dining, and entertainment."

The most anticipated parade event is the Blessing of the Flags at St. Mary of the Visitation Catholic Church on Jefferson Street.

"When Father Bill (William M. Kelly, S.D.S.) performs the blessing ceremony over the Irish and American flags, it really has special meaning for the American Irish community and leaves everyone, Irish or not, with a 'Wow' feeling," said Douglas.

Another popular attraction at the parade is the Father Treacy Division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians' float.



Photo credit: Shutterstock.com

Father Jeremiah F. Treacy moved to Huntsville in 1860 because of health problems and established a parish here. The church was built of native stone from Monte Sano Mountain, but construction was halted during the Civil War while the Hibernians prepared hospital facilities and tended to the wounded on both sides of the conflict.

'Tis better to spend money like there's no tomorrow than to spend tonight like there's no money! - Anonymous

Since it isn't St. Patrick's Day without some libation and food, many pubs and shops along the parade route will be offering St. Patrick's Day specials.

The parade's main sponsor Straight to Ale, Keegan's Public House (who bought Finnegan's and moved it downtown), and the Jefferson Street Pub are all opening at 6 a.m. serving an authentic Kegs & Eggs Irish Breakfast prior to the parade, which starts at 11:30. Green Bluff's Brewery, Pints & Pixels, and The Marini Bar & Bistro will offer all-day live Irish music and \$1 green beer along the parade route.

While you're there, be sure and lift a glass in a famous Irish toast: ***Here's to a long life and a merry one. A quick death and an easy one. A pretty girl and an honest one. A cold pint and another one!*** *

COVER STORY

Madison County's Top Economic Development Stories of 2018

In 2018 Huntsville saw new companies planting seeds, older companies deepening their roots,...Read more inside!

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SMALL BUSINESS

Lewter Hardware: If We Don't Have It, You Probably Don't Need It



Entering Lewter Hardware is like entering Grand Central Station at rush hour.

By Lori J. Connors - Page 4

ENTREPRENEUR

Redline Steel Offers Home Decor Made in the USA



Colin Wayne is putting "Made in the USA" decor back in American homes.

By Wendy Reeves - Page 13

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Madison County's Top Econom

By Kimbe

According to Inc. magazine, tech companies are feeling the pressure of rising costs in large coastal cities. Businesses and residents are leaving in search of opportunities in less expensive areas.

This is great news for Huntsville which, in 2018, saw new companies planting seeds, older companies deepening their roots, infrastructure branching outward, and the quality of life flourishing as active lifestyles demand more room to grow.

Inc. writer David Brown puts Huntsville No. 2 among the Top Six "Attention-grabbing Cities for Tech Start-ups."

"NASA's presence is largely responsible for the Rocket City's high rankings on the opportunity scale for engineers. The city has also executed well in forging strong public-private partnerships and promoting a thriving technology industry. Software development, electrical engineering, and computer science are top fields, contributing to the city's 309 percent year-over-year growth in tech jobs."

With so many sensational "gets" for Huntsville and Madison this past year, the question is whether it is sustainable?

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle and Chip Cherry, President & CEO of the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce, answer that question.

"We have spent the past 10 years with a focused, intentional plan to grow and diversify our job base, improve quality of life, and capitalize on the rich assets in Huntsville and North Alabama," said Battle, "We've put an emphasis on workforce development in our schools. Our road projects are designed to keep traffic moving long into the future. We are making Huntsville more appealing and desirable for top talent to move here through parks, music and cultural amenities, greenways and bike lanes.

"We don't plan just for the next year. We plan for the next 10 to 20 years. For example, we created the Cyber Huntsville initiative and worked with that volunteer group to land the State Cyber and Engineering School in Huntsville. This program, along with many others in our public schools and universities, will help prepare the tech workforce we will need for the future."

Cherry agreed that diversification is the key.

"A diversified base of businesses coupled with a strong and diversified portfolio on Redstone Arsenal are key to ensuring that we have a dynamic regional economy," he said. "The community's economic development wins in 2018 will impact the community for generations to come.

"The blend of new locations and expansions will provide a broad range of employment opportunities as well as providing business opportunities for local companies to grow."

Here are the Huntsville Business Journal's top Madison County business stories of 2018:

Mazda Toyota Manufacturing

Of all the big business acquisitions and developments launched in 2018, Mayor Battle said that if he had to focus on a single mayoral accomplishment in

2018, the Mazda-Toyota announcement dwarfs all others because of its impact on our economy year in, and year out.

"I've often said the hard work on a project comes after the announcement, and the scale of this [Mazda Toyota] project was no exception," he said. "It brought enormous challenges from its sheer size and scope. Clearing 1,200 acres, bringing in 7 million yards of dirt, putting a building pad in place with a solid rock foundation, building roads, and all the other challenges associated with a development - many times over.

"Fortunately, we worked in partnership with the Mazda Toyota Manufacturing U.S. team. And we are able to navigate through the challenges together and meet our deadlines. Now the building is ready to go vertical and on track to produce cars in 2021. This plant will provide jobs for 4,000-5,000 workers, generational jobs that will impact our economy for decades to come."

Being built by Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA, the sprawling site will produce 300,000 next-generation Toyota Corollas and a yet-to-be-revealed Mazda crossover model annually, beginning in 2021.

Investment in the Mazda Toyota plant is being split evenly between the automakers, allowing both automakers to respond quickly to market changes and ensure sustainable growth.

"While there were a number of things that placed our community in a strong competitive position to win this project," Cherry said. "In the end, it was the ability of our team, and our partners, to be nimble and responsive that made the difference."

Rocket City Trash Pandas

In early 2018, the City of Madison approved up to \$46 million to build a baseball stadium, signaling minor league baseball's return to the Tennessee Valley.

Highly visible from I-565 off Madison Boulevard at Zierdt Road, the ballpark will seat 5,500 baseball fans, and is part of the Town Madison project.



The team - named the Rocket City Trash Pandas in a voting contest - will officially move from Mobile to Madison after the 2019 baseball season and remain the farm team for the Los Angeles Angels.

Town Madison

Town Madison development, which held several groundbreakings in 2018 after nearly 2 years of dormancy as \$100 million in new road construction was built to accommodate traffic flow to and from the development.



Town Madison will include 700,000 square feet of office space; over 1 million square feet of retail space; 700 new hotel rooms; over 1,200 luxury apartments; and 300 single-family homes.

"We're very pleased to see groundbreakings underway in the Town Madison space," said Pam Honeycutt, executive director of the Madison Chamber of Commerce. "When complete, it will be a true destination spot, enabling families to spend the day enjoying entertainment, shopping and dining."

Last February, Home2 Suites by Hilton was the first to announce it was breaking ground on a 97 all-suite extended-stay hotel as part of the section called West End at Town Madison. The hotel is scheduled to open early this year.

Wisconsin-based retailer Duluth Trading Co. broke ground on its 15,000-square foot store in early December. The company is Town Madison's first retail partner and will open this year.

As part of The Exchange at Town Madison, local developer Louis Breland broke ground last April on a 274-unit luxury apartment complex called The Station at Town Madison. It is slated to open in the summer.

In late May, Breland confirmed the development of a 150-room Margaritaville Hotel adjacent to the ballpark. It is set to open in 2020.

Madison Mayor Paul Finley said, "Margaritaville is an international brand known for high-quality and fun projects. Not only will this hotel attract guests from across the region, but it will add multiple new dining and entertainment options for Madison residents."

The Heights and The Commons at Town Madison will provide a mixture of affordable single-family and multifamily homes, townhomes, spacious luxury apartments, and condominiums around a village square. Home prices will range from \$250,000 to \$500,000.

MidCity Huntsville

Certain to take significant shape throughout 2019, MidCity Huntsville is a dynamic 100-acre experiential mixed-use community right in the center of Huntsville. When finished, it will consist of a series of interconnected spaces and gathering places.

MidCity will feature dining, entertainment and recreation from names such as REI Co-op, Wahlburgers, Rascal Flatt's, and High Point Climbing and Fitness.

STORY

ic Development Stories of 2018

erly Ballard

Already in operation is Top Golf, a sports entertainment center with climate-controlled golf-ball hitting bays, a full-service restaurant and bar, private event spaces and meeting rooms; a rooftop terrace with fire pit, hundreds of HDTVs, and free wi-fi.

The development will also offer bike and walking trails, a park, an 8,500-seat open-air amphitheater, and The Stage for outdoor music and entertainment.

Area 120 is a science and technology accelerator with some 200,000 square feet of space for R&D and startups.

The Promenade with its hardscaped space will accommodate local farmers markets and Huntsville's growing food truck fleet. You will also find luxury apartments and a hotel.

GE Aviation

Two years ago, GE Aviation announced it had almost cracked the code to mass producing the unique ceramic matrix composite (CMC) components used in jet propulsion engines, and when they did, the company would build two facilities in Huntsville to produce them.

Last May, GE Aviation announced they will open a 100-acre factory complex, destined to be the only location in the U.S. to produce these ultralightweight CMC components, which can withstand extremely high temperatures.

Investment in the project is expected to reach \$200 million. GE Aviation currently employs 90 people at the Huntsville site and is expected to reach 300 at full production.

Facebook

Facebook will invest \$750 million into a large-scale data center in Huntsville that will bring an estimated 100 high-paying jobs to the area.



The Huntsville City Council gave unanimous approval for Facebook to purchase 340 acres in the North Huntsville Industrial Park for \$8.5 million. They began construction on the 970,000-square-foot facility in late 2018.

"We believe in preparing our community for the challenges ahead," said Battle. "Our Gig City initiative to provide city-wide high-speed connectivity is an example of that."

The Downtown Madison Sealy Project

When the City of Madison announced that changes to the west side of Sullivan Street between Kyser Boulevard and Gin Oaks Court would pave the way for more commercial/retail space, it marked the beginning of a long-term improvement and expansion project for downtown Madison that would pick up steam in 2018.

Known as the Downtown Madison Sealy Project, it is the latest in a series of mixed-use developments about to hit downtown, extending from the east side of Sullivan Street to Short Street.

The city is making improvements to accommodate the 10,000 square-foot development which includes 190 upscale apartments and more than 10,000 square feet of retail space.

GATR Technologies

In April, Huntsville-based GATR Technologies announced it would be quadrupling its production capacity in Cummings Research Park to nearly 100,000 square feet.

The inflatable portable satellite innovator was acquired by Cubic Mission Solutions in 2016 and has grown from 80 employees in 2016 to 157 in 2018. GATR is projected to employ more than 200 people by October 2019.

GATR will soon be delivering systems by the thousands to the U. S. government, military, and any entity that benefits from deployable communications, such as in the aftermath of a natural disaster.

Electro Optic Systems

In June, Electro Optic Systems announced it will build its flagship production facility at on Wall Triana Highway in Huntsville.

The Australian aerospace technology and defense company expects to hire up to 100 fulltime employees in its first year and is scaled to grow to at least 250 employees quickly.

EOS has been producing software, lasers, electronics, optronics, gimbals, telescopes, beam directors, and stabilization and precision mechanisms for the military space, missile defense, and surface warfare sectors for more than 20 years.

BAE Systems

BAE Systems, the third-largest defense contractor in the world, broke ground on a \$45.5 million expansion of its existing facilities in CRP in July. The growth is expected to create hundreds of jobs.

The new 83,000-square-foot facility is the first phase of a multi-phase growth plan to expand its existing offices on Discovery Drive and develop a new state-of-the-art manufacturing and office space facility in CRP to increase their capacity. An unused adjacent 20-acre lot will provide room for yet more expansion soon. Construction of the new building is expected to be complete in 2019.

Radiance Technologies

Employee-owned defense contractor Radiance Technologies broke ground in July on their first

comprehensive headquarters in Huntsville.

The new 100,000 square foot building in CRP will, for the first time, allow the company's 300 employees, all of whom have operated at remote locations in Huntsville since 1999, to collaborate under the same roof as they provide innovative technology to the Department of Defense, NASA, and national intelligence agencies.

South Memorial Parkway Expansion

The short but significant widening and redesign of the main line of South Memorial Parkway caused many headaches for residents and business owners over the past 2½ years, but in late July, that stretch between Golf Road and Whitesburg Drive officially re-opened.



The \$54 million project opened a gateway of uninterrupted traffic through South Huntsville, providing easier accessibility to South Huntsville businesses, schools, and residential areas.

"South Parkway being fully open is a game-changer for businesses and drivers in South Huntsville," said Claire Aiello, vice president of Marketing and Communications at the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce.

Looking to 2019

"Our objective has been to build on the community's traditional industries such as aerospace and defense, while creating more opportunities in the semi-skilled and skilled sectors of the economy," said Cherry. "We excelled in all of these areas in 2018. The year will go down in the record books as among the most vibrant economic development years in our history. The companies that selected our community for their new location or expansion will create over 5,400 new jobs and invest over \$2.7 billion in new buildings and equipment. These investments and jobs will have a profound impact on our quality of life for decades to come."

"Cummings Research Park is now at 91 percent occupancy," said Aiello. "We are making a big focus on new amenities for employees at CRP to keep them engaged and to give them things to do in the park besides work. That will be something to look forward to in 2019."

And according to Battle, "2019 is going to be a good year. Let's just keep it at that!" ❄️

COVER STORY

Retailers Dreaming of a “Black” Christmas

Supposedly, on the day after Thanksgiving, shoppers are so full of turkey and dressing, and so weary of nonstop football, that they can't wait to go out and blow some dough on heavily discounted merchandise.

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VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESS

Why Huntsville's Business Environment Embraces Veterans



Civilians may have to search Huntsville out on a map, but in the Army, Huntsville is a well-known destination for retiring veterans who want to do business with the government.

By Kimberly Ballard • Page 3

EDUCATION

With New Propst Center, HudsonAlpha's Mission Continues



Brightly colored beads in clear containers of various sizes and shapes represent more than 5 million learners who have experienced a HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology (HAIB) educational outreach opportunity.

By Lori J. Connors • Page 12

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Retailers Dreaming o

Written by Kimberly Ballard

For years economists have pushed the idea that “Black Friday” is the first day of the year in which retailers operating all year “in the red” and at a loss, use the Christmas buying season to turn a profit putting them “in the black.”

Supposedly on the day after Thanksgiving, shoppers are so full of turkey and dressing, and so weary of nonstop football, they can't wait to blow some dough on heavily discounted merchandise.

The History Channel, however, says this is a myth.

According to the cable TV channel, Black Friday got its name in the 1950s from the Philadelphia police who used the term “Black Friday” to refer to post-Thanksgiving chaos when thousands of suburban shoppers flooded into the city to shop, causing the police to work extra-long shifts to deal with crowds and traffic. This not-so-holly-jolly story also included battling shoplifters who took advantage of the bedlam.

So much for good tidings.

That Black Friday is the single largest retail sales day of the year, however, rings true.

According to the American Marketing Association based on statistics from Adobe Analytics, U.S. retailers

earned a record \$7.9 billion on Black Friday, Nov. 24, 2017, an increase of nearly 18 percent from 2016.

“Cyber Monday” 2017 added another \$6.6 billion in internet sales, making it the largest online shopping day in history. Those sales figures also pushed Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's net worth past \$100 billion on the day after Thanksgiving, 2017.

This bump in Black Friday spending does not, as many people believe, bode poorly for brick and mortar retail shopping.

Retail research firm ShopperTrak says store traffic declined less than 1 percent on Black Friday 2017, a significantly lesser decline than projected. In 2018, the National Retail Federation projects holiday retail sales in November and December — excluding automobiles, gasoline and restaurants — will increase between 4.3 and 4.8 percent over 2017 for a total of \$720.89 billion.

Here Comes Santa Claus

Janet Brown, Manager for Belk at Bridge Street confirms that Black Friday is the biggest retail sales day of year, but that truth comes with a little enticement.

“We open at 4 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day and are open until 1 a.m.,” Brown said. “Then we open again at 6 a.m. on Black Friday. The first 200 people in line Thursday receive a gift card in denominations of anywhere from \$5 to one prize of \$500 at every Belk store. On Friday, the first 100 customers in line receive



Annie & Gigi Granger shopping at Belk

gift cards. Belk as a company is giving away \$1,000,000 in gift cards to customers who stand in line.”

Belk will hold Santafest in the children's department Nov. 10 featuring arts and crafts as well as, of course, pictures with Santa.

The retailer will also have a toy store that officials hope will fill the gap left by the departure of Toys 'R Us; and they welcome choral groups to sing while people shop. The store will offer refreshments and goodies throughout the holidays and during the official tree lighting event on the Bridge Street promenade.

“We are not doing these things to compete with online sales and to bring people into the store,” says Brown. “Belk has always held these special activities to add a festive atmosphere to our stores during the Christmas season.”

All I Want for Christmas

Tiffani Spengler, manager of Alabama Outdoor in Jones Valley, said they notice a big uptick starting on Black Friday, but they see it as the kickoff for the rest of the busy season ahead.

“We sell a lot of gift items, but we have a whole lot of visitors who want

to see what we have available, measure their options, and get ideas,” she said. “They may or may not buy on Black Friday, but we see a steady stream of people who return to make purchases all the way up to Christmas.”

“Everyone gets the same experience whether you know what you are looking for like a Patagonia sweater or rock-climbing gear; or whether you are looking for a gift for someone who loves hiking and camping, but you aren't sure what to get them,” said Spengler. “We can show you how to pack a backpack, explain the difference between buying a sleeping bag and a sleeping pad, help you dress in layers, so you stay warm for a three-day camping trip; or help you prepare for a vacation to Iceland.”

Apparel is their most popular holiday items because Alabama Outdoor promotes functionality and fashion. Jackets, pullovers, fleece and down layered clothing that protects against the elements, hats, scarves, neck warmers, blankets, and socks are all gift favorites.

I'll Be Home for Christmas

“Shoppers are on a mission, especially when looking for gifts for Christmas,” said Dr. Ana Byrne, own-



Courtesy Getty Images iStock.com

of a “Black” Christmas

• Photography by Steve Babin

er of The Little Green Store on Monte Sano Mountain and the new holiday shop in downtown Huntsville. “They are on a mission to find something interesting, looking for one-of-a-kind, handmade pieces, local artwork, and finely crafted décor. The new store downtown is a challenge because most of our merchandise is individual artistic pieces.”

Will they be doing anything different for Black Friday?

“Our goal is always to make people feel happy, welcome, and

comfortable while they are here, and we always work hard at that,” Byrne said. “If it is cold, I have hot chocolate for them to drink; if it is hot, I have cold water for them to drink. We wrap everything you buy as a gift and deliver if you need help getting it home.

“We hold art shows, open houses, and participate in Under the Christmas Tree, activities that keep people seeing what’s new and gives them a chance to meet the artists,” she said. “We carry a lot of holiday items like handmade tree ornaments, ceramics, and Raku Nativities. Our customers are loyal and we have fun with them. We know their taste enough to say, ‘We have something new you are going to love – take a look at this.’”

Santa Baby

Fatemeh Nazarieh and Donny Maleknia of Donny’s Diamond Gallery admits the Christmas holidays are the busiest time of the year for jewelers, but they offer several advantages for people looking for a more relaxing shopping experience on Black Friday.

“Located along the Parkway, no matter how busy we are, there are no

problems finding a parking place, no parking garages, we have easy access with no traffic coming in and out, and we have hot drinks, cookies, and candy for you to enjoy while you shop. It is all part of creating a festive atmosphere for shopping,” said Nazarieh.

“The trends in jewelry among younger customers are custom designs, especially in engagement rings. They want something that is theirs alone and of course custom designs is Donny’s specialty.”

Their holiday kickoff came earlier than Black Friday this year with a gem show in late October featuring David Artinian, the Gem Hunter.

“Colored gems and stones are growing in popularity. We specialize in diamonds, but this is the second year David Artinian has done a show with us. People buy the stones and it takes four to six weeks to design a jewelry piece that showcases the stone, just in time for Christmas,” Nazarieh said. “We also have plenty of preset diamonds and gems in our showcases too, so we have something for everyone and in all price ranges.”

O Tannenbaum

Opening at 9 a.m. on Black Friday Pat and Roger Schwerman’s Christmas Tree Plantation in Lacey’s Spring provides the perfect family holiday experience.

Roger grew up on a large farm in Kansas. He and his wife Pat bought the fully operational Christmas Tree farm in 2002, shortly after 9/11. Being in the Pentagon on that day, Roger wanted to get away for some peace and quiet, so he came back and “bought the farm,”

so to speak.

“We don’t sell trees, we sell tradition,” said Schwerman.

“I had people stop by and plead with me, sometimes almost threaten me – ‘I’ve been coming to this Christ-



mas tree plantation for 30 years for my Christmas trees and I want that to continue. You cannot get rid of the trees!” he said with a laugh.

He and Pat had no intention to do so. Their 70-acre Christmas tree plantation has Virginia pine, white pine, leland cypress and deodar cedars and is only open on weekends from Black Friday through Dec. 24.

There are also horses, cows, baby goats, and chickens for the kids to pet and feed. There are antique tractors to enjoy, a country gift shop, a Santa Claus on site, and a train for the little kids to ride.

Pat Schwerman said families carry out an old tradition of cutting their own Christmas trees.

“When you arrive, we provide you with a saw and a measuring stick. You can pick out any tree on the farm you want. We have ‘elves’ to help you if you need any,” she said. “If you cut a live tree on the day after Thanksgiving and put it in a bucket of water when you get home, it will still be fresh after Christmas.

“A previously cut tree is dead and drying out when you buy it. That is why families get together and enjoy the experience of choosing their own tree.” ❁



Chris Gregory of Roosevelt & Co Gentlemen’s Supply with Ana Byrne of The Little Green Store

COVER STORY

OH, THE HORROR!

Cashing in on the Business of Zombies, Superheros, Mystical Creatures, & Severed Heads.

Page 8



TRANSPORTATION

Silver Airways Taking Flight at Huntsville International Airport



Silver Airways has joined the ranks of air carriers at Huntsville International Airport and will bring another option for travelers to Florida.

Bud McLaughlin • Page 3

RETAIL

Stovehouse Helps Heat Up a New Westside



Proving something old can have a fresh start is happening behind the brick walls topped by a large red “STOVEHOUSE” sign along Governors Drive just west of Campus 805. By the end of the year, restaurants and retail boutiques will be open there.

Wendy Reeves • Page 10

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OH, THE

Cashing in on the Business of Zombies, Super

By Kimberly Ballard / Ph



Americans will not just wander around with their arms or heads slashed open for fun this Halloween, but they will gash their wallets wide open in search of the perfect frightfest.

According to 2017 National Retail Federation (NRF) statistics, more than 179 million Americans will participate in Halloween activities this year. Thirty-five percent will either attend or throw a Halloween party and, as creepy as this sounds, they will spend more than \$9.1 billion on Halloween-related products and services.

This ghoulish phenomenon is enough to run chills up the spines of many businessowners and entrepreneurs looking for new revenue streams. Only Christmas has higher participation and seasonal profits in terms of how far people will go with decorations and holiday activities.

In 2012, David Businda was looking into starting a retail business when a colleague suggested a Halloween store. At first, he was skeptical.

"The more I looked into it, I discovered a Halloween Express franchise was pretty liberal in its operations, giving owners a lot of flexibility not found in most franchise opportunities," said Businda. "There were no limits or demands on marketing or buying stock, and I was able to buy the North Alabama territory, so I can open stores as far south as Birmingham.

"Right now, we are only in Hunts-

ville but that could change."

For the first few years, Halloween Express had a store on University Drive.

"We are only open Sept. 1 through Nov. 1, so it is sometimes difficult to lease short-term store space," Businda said. "Last year, Parkway Place welcomed us into the mall.

"We see profits of between \$300,000 and \$350,000 in those 60 days, and I don't see it slowing down."

Parkway Place Marketing Director Molly Mitchell said they have made a substantial impact on local sales.

"Sales were up significantly throughout Parkway Place in September and October," she said. "Halloween Express was an amazing addition to our tenant mix and we are thrilled to have them back at Parkway Place for the 2018 fall/Halloween Season.

"They have expanded their footprint into two locations: one for home décor and props, and the other for costumes and makeup."

Part of the mall's success has been sponsoring the Mall-o-Ween Extravaganza and hosting the annual Junior Face-Off contest for the past two years. Mitchell said there were more than 2,000 people in attendance last year.

On Oct. 14, Halloween Express will hold a Spooky Halloween Make-up and Prop Class to prep kids for the Oct. 28 Junior Face-Off contest.

Halloween Express will provide contestants with a goodie bag full of

make-up, fake blood, and some prosthetics. They will have 45 minutes to use everything in the bag to make up their parents as a Halloween ghoul or their favorite superhero or character. The first-place winner bags a \$50 gift certificate.

Due to the growing popularity of Halloween there are several areas where an entrepreneur may find unique business opportunities such as providing Halloween music for parties and events; offering decorating services for residences as well as office environments; setting up a haunted house and charging admission; creating and/or selling costumes, masks, prosthetics, and props; and coordinating and managing parties and events for children and adults.

Many Huntsville business owners and nonprofits are already taking advantage of the benefits.

Nichole Harris, co-owner and event manager for Birmingham-based ICrawlUSA, started an event management company that specializes in theme crawls and theme parties.

Night Crawling

Bar-crawling or just "crawling" has grown in popularity across the country in the past three to five years. They are putting on Huntsville's first Night of the Crawling Dead Halloween Bar

Crawl downtown this year.

Below the Radar Brewhouse on Holmes Avenue, SiP on Greene Street, Martin Bar and Bistro on Washington Street, and Pints & Pixels on Clinton Avenue are participating. Crawlers pay \$15 for a ticket in advance, and dressed out in full costumes, go from bar to bar enjoying free and discounted drinks at participating bars. The event starts at 6 p.m. and drink specials run through 8:30 p.m., however the party lasts until midnight, culminating in a costume contest at Pints & Pixels.

"The participating pubs can offer whatever drink specials and food too if they want, but we recommend the 3-2-1 method," said Harris. "That is \$3 wells, \$2 shots, and \$1 beers. Crawlers will receive a wristband and a passport that will guide them to all the participating bars."

Harris said it is a popular group event, but anyone over the age of 21 is welcome.

"I think the attraction for adults in Halloween is the opportunity to relax and be a kid again," she said. "People have responsibilities with jobs and families and other obligations, and this is a chance to celebrate, gather together with friends, dress up in a costume, and be anyone you want to be for the night."

Matthew Bakula, events coordina-



HORROR!

Heroes, Mystical Creatures, & Severed Heads

Photography by Steve Babin



tor at Lowe Mill Arts & Entertainment, said Halloween is just good business for the art studios.

"We offer something for all ages beginning with the kids from 4-7 p.m. We have Trick or Treat inside the building for the children and all the studios participate with candy, and then we have a pumpkin carving contest," he said.

Then, at 8 p.m., things get theatrical as the grown-ups take over. In the past, there has been a Pizza Party Massacre and it may return this year; however, in addition to the adult Halloween party, Lowe Mill plans a Drive-in Horror Movie showing on the concert dock, charging \$10 per car. There will be three classic Halloween horror flicks – rain or shine. One year it rained, but more than 6,000 people still showed up.

"We are very performance-based here at Lowe Mill," said Bakula. "Halloween is a time in which adults are free to be whatever they want to be whether it is a different person, some creature, or manifest a different personality – and then of course – enjoy a party."

Of Superheroes and Zombies

While nearly half of all Halloween-goers will wear a costume, they will also

spend more money on their garb than anything else related to the haunted holiday.

According to the NRF, men average \$96 and women average \$77 per costume. Witches, superhero characters, animals, and vampires are the most popular choices, but 20 percent of pet owners will dress up their family pet as a pumpkin, a hot dog, a bumble bee, or the devil.

"Halloween is an escape from reality for a day," said a spokesperson for Spirit Halloween, a seasonal retailer at Bridge Street Town Centre. "For adults, you can put on a Halloween costume and forget about work ... and other pressures."

Rita Burkholder, owner of Fig Leaf Costumes, said it is not all about the costume itself, anymore, now that people can reek of zombies and realistically display severed limbs and deformities.

"TV shows like the Sci-Fi Channel's Face-Off has sparked a whole new way to project mystical effects using make-up, prosthetics, fake blood, and body painting to create realistic mask-like faces and creature effects," she said.

Ronnie Young, manager of the prop and decorations division of Halloween Express, and owner of his own Redrum SSX Studios, said Halloween has been boosted by a love for the horror genre and TV shows such as "The Walking Dead," "Face-Off" and "American Horror Story."

"You would be shocked at how popular it is with people to create wild characters using hair and make-up," he said. "With 75 percent of Americans celebrating in a big way, it can expand beyond Halloween.

"I have done zombie-themed corporate parties, horror-themed weddings, and birthday massacre parties."

Speaking of corporate parties, the Huntsville Young Professionals (HYP) have expanded what used to be a joint party with the Huntsville Land Trust in the Haunt at 3 Caves the past five years, into the Nightmare on Church Street on the east side of Big Spring Park this year.

Mallory Johnston, president of HYP, said the big Halloween party has



always drawn more than 600 members and friends to the group's only fundraiser throughout the year.

"We don't charge fees or dues to be a member, so this is an important and success event for us," says Johnston. "We raised \$13,000 last year and, even though we don't have a costume contest, people go all out."

Strictly for adults 21 and over, HYP offers a cash bar and live band. Tickets are \$35 per person and \$55 after Oct 16. VIP tickets are \$75 and includes six complimentary cocktails, access to bathrooms with no line, and an attendant who takes drink orders.

Decorating for Demons

Finally, as an extra for Halloween pumpkin carvers, Christy Wray of Silver Moon Art Studio in Scottsboro held several Jack-O-Lantern Sculp-

ture and Wicked Witch 3-D Door Hanger workshops at Top Key Market in South Huntsville. Wray teaches art lovers secret recycling methods to create Halloween sculptures and ceramics using things that most people have laying around the house. They even make their own air-dried clay.

"I have been thrilled at the response to our classes this year," she said. "We charge \$125 for the Wicked Witch 3-D Door Hangers class and \$140 for the Jack-O-Lantern sculptures and people go all out to create amazing sculpture for their homes, yards, and patios."

Considering people will decorate their home or yard, Wray's classes, which are designed to last two to three hours over a 3-day period, often stretch out longer because participants are enthusiastic about their work creating realistic, life-size sculptures that will give neighbors a chill.

Oh, and attendees are welcome to bring their own spirits ... metaphysically and the other kind! 🎃





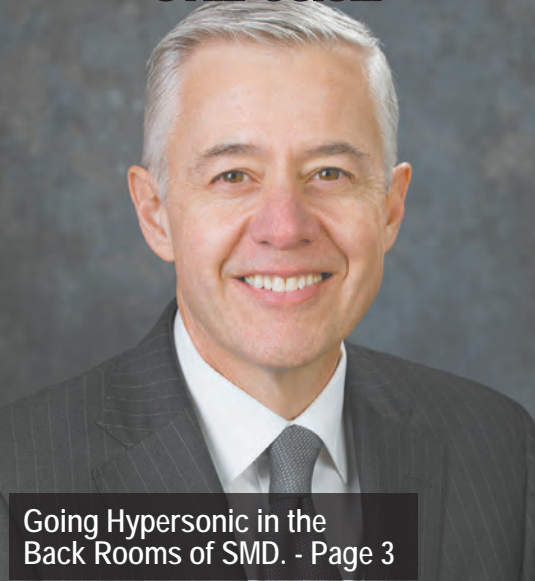
COVER STORY

21st ANNUAL SPACE & MISSILE DEFENSE SYMPOSIUM

Researching How the U.S. Meets the Challenges of a Peer Adversary

What began as a local gathering of enthusiastic space and missile defense professionals more than 20 years ago, has evolved into one of the most anticipated, informative, and influential national public conferences on the defense of our nation. - **Page 8**

SPACE & MISSILE SYMPOSIUM



Going Hypersonic in the Back Rooms of SMD. - **Page 3**

TRAVEL



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21st ANNUAL SPACE & MISSILE

Researching How the U.S. Meets the

By Kimber



What began as a local gathering of enthusiastic space and missile defense professionals more than 20 years ago, has evolved into one of the most anticipated, informative, and influential national public conferences on the defense of our nation.

The 21st Annual Space and Missile Defense Symposium opens Aug. 7 at the Von Braun Center and runs through Aug. 9.

Embraced by the Missile Defense Agency and the Department of Defense, Brig. Gen. Bob McCaleb and Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle will welcome enterprise level professionals from the missile defense community, military leaders, and allies from the United States and abroad.

According to Joe Fitzgerald, an original member of the SMD Symposium's executive committee and two-time past chairman of the event, the 2018 theme, "Sharpening the Military's Competitive Edge," marks a fundamental shift in the way industry professionals have looked at the threats our country

faces for many years.

"This year's Space & Missile Defense Symposium will bring to the forefront the realization that the United States has peer adversaries," he said. "That is, not just threats from rogue nations like Iran and North Korea, but very real threats from countries across the globe who are our equals."

He said the symposium will address the important part missile defense plays in the survival and security of our nation.

"You will see a recognition that we face challenges meeting those threats, and that we must put more resources into missile defense technologies associated with those threats to ensure our nation's future, and to assure the defense of our nation. Victory is not assured," Fitzgerald said. "therefore, we must work to maintain our competitive edge, and by edge, we mean superiority."

Gen. John Hyten, (pictured right) a Grissom High School grad, will open this year's SMD Symposium.

This year's SMD Symposium will address all aspects of these challenges.

Conference Opening

Beginning Tuesday morning, Gen. John Hyten, senior commander of the United States Strategic Command, will open the symposium by outlining Space and Missile Defense Imperatives. USSTRATCOM is one



of 10 unified commands in the Department of Defense representing all four unified branches of the military.

Among the topics he is expected to discuss is the importance of innovation related to space and the military's interdependence on space, national security, and the global economy.

In a December 2017 article in SpaceNews, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Stephen Kitay said the modernization of missile-warning satellites has been a topic of recent conversations with leaders from U.S. Air Force Space Command, U.S. Strategic Command and U.S. Northern Command. So, will Hyten, a graduate of Huntsville's Grissom High School, offer any insights into the future of a new Space Force as recently proposed by the current administration?

"I think Space Force is likely to come up given Gen. Hyten's relationship with the Air Force Space Command," said Fitzgerald. "Advanced forces surely add flavor to his thought process, and any future Space Force plans are bound to affect Huntsville for sure."

Lt. Gen. James Dickinson, Commanding General of the United States Army Space and Missile Defense Command follows Hyten with a Space and Missile Defense update and, later, Col. William Darne, the Training & Doctrine Command Capabilities Manager for the Army Air and Missile Defense, will give an update on the AMD's Cross-Functional Teams.

After lunch Tuesday, Dr. Tom Karako, Senior Fellow and International Security Program Director for the Missile Defense Project, will speak on adapting Joint Air and Missile Defense Operations to the Near Peer Threat. The Missile Defense Project researches innovative means for defeating missile threats and hosts a variety of events to shape the debate about policy, budgets, legislation, and both current and future programs.

Both Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, Technology Track gives a variety of selected candidates

STORY

MISSILE DEFENSE SYMPOSIUM: The Challenges of a Peer Adversary

Kimberly Ballard

an opportunity to present innovative technical ideas, methods, and processes regarding cyber resiliency, testing and development, and weapon system performance testing and validation.

Several moderators will host a Multi-Domain Battle Panel Tuesday afternoon. Created by the Army, Multi-Domain Battle allows U.S. forces to outmaneuver adversaries physically and cognitively by applying combined arms in and across all domains of war – that is, land, sea, air, space and cyberspace – cyber being the newest domain, and with underpinnings in every aspect of strategic warfare.

Wednesday & Thursday Features

The programs Wednesday include the MDA's Focus For the Future presented by Lt. Gen. Samu-

el Greaves, director of the MDA; an Allied Update by Air Commodore Madelein Spit, Assistant Director of NATO Joint Air Power Competence Center; and an update from Brig. Gen. Robert Rasch Jr. on the Programs Executive Office Missiles and Space, which provides centralized management for Army Air and Missile Defense and Tactical Missile Programs, as well as selected Army Space programs to meet warfighter multidomain and full spectrum operation requirements.

There will be two Industry and Technology panels Wednesday focused singularly on missile defense with a variety of guests participating including major original equipment manufacturers and developers of our nation's missile defense systems. They will talk about the technology challenges, and what the R&D industry is doing to meet those challenges.

On Wednesday evening, prior to an invitation-only VIP reception, Northrop Grumman will host the "Salute to the Warfighter" at its exhibition space. A presentation recognizing and honoring all U.S. warfighters involves a formal salute followed by a networking social and then dinner.

On Thursday, Holly Haverstick, Chief of Weapons for Defense Support of Civil Authorities, will speak on security cooperation efforts in support of missile defense; followed by Rebecca Heinrichs, Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute, who will close out the symposium with a talk concerning Space and Missile Defense Imperatives.

Awards & Recognitions

Throughout the week, various industry groups will present a variety of awards such as the Air, Space

and Missile Defense Association Scholarship and the Julian Davidson Award, awarded by the National Space Club to an individual or organization that has shown great achievement in advancing space flight programs, and has contributed to U.S. leadership in the field of rocketry and astronautics.

The John Medaris Award, given to an individual from the Tennessee Valley who has made outstanding contributions to the defense industrial base, will be awarded to Dr. J. Richard (Dick) Fisher, Executive Director of the Missile Defense and Space Technology Center.

"The entire conference is laid out to be an exposé on meeting the challenges of a peer adversary, while focusing our efforts on ways to give our soldiers a competitive edge that is superior to anyone else in the world," said Fitzgerald. ■

Technology Track to Innovation & Breakthroughs

By Kimberly Ballard

Every year, the Space & Missile Defense Symposium chooses two topic areas pertinent to that year's SMD focus, and they provide members of the space and missile defense community the opportunity to submit and present innovations and technical ideas.

For the program known as Technology Track, the committee sends out a call for entries several months in advance for two-page written abstracts describing the basis of their work with enough detail to allow for an evaluation of that work in the two major topic areas. This year, the committee received more than 25 submissions for which the panel chose five in the area of Cyber Resiliency, Testing, and Development; and six for Weapon System Performance Testing and Evaluation.

"These are submissions to present their work and have a discussion about that work at the conference, and not submissions for funding, so there is no 'Big Reveal' so-to-speak," said Stephen Cayson, chief operating officer for CFD Research and a member of the SMD planning committee. "The topics can really run the gamut between someone wanting to present new work they have developed, and someone wanting to report on the status of something they have been working on.

"Research and development work can quickly become classified and we are working in a public forum, so we usually lean toward established work, since a lot of the new work is sensitive and often, not something that can be discussed in an open setting."

Cayson said the committee has scoring criteria for the submissions and, sometimes, it can get very competitive.

Technology Track is a 2-day event.

On Aug. 7, Paul Page with the Space & Missile Defense Command presents "Cyber Hardening by Replicating and Simulating"; Yaron Shragal with

Draper Labs presents "CHROME: A State of the Art System for Comprehensive, Non-intrusive Cyber Resiliency"; Rob Goldsmith of SMDC/ARSTRAT presents "Cyber Resiliency and Mission Assurance"; Denise Jefferson of Northrop Grumman presents "A Tool to Inject Credible Warfighter-focused Non-kinetic Attack Effects into the BMDS M&S Environment"; and Connor Wood and Justan Provence, also of Northrop Grumman, present "Micro-service Data Pipelines".

"We encourage our Technology Track presenters to keep their presentation down to twenty minutes to allow for ten minutes of questions and discussion," said Cayson. "We really have a lot of great discussions come out of these presentations.

"Technologists are an underserved class in our community and we like to give them the opportunity to get together with other professionals and give them a chance to meet others working on similar projects, to develop that network, and to learn from each other."

The next day, James Buford, Gary Freeman, and David Mallett, all from the Aviation & Missile Research, Development, and Engineering Center at SMDC/ARSTRAT present "New and Improved Advanced Measurements Optical Range (AMOR) Capability for Advanced Sensing Capabilities"; and Perri Nejjib of Northrop Grumman does a presentation called "Resiliency by Design, Defeating All Threats Cyber and Ballistic Missile-start Secure, Stay Secure, Return Secure".

Phil Carey of the CMDS Project Office; Craig Burrow with Intuitive Research & Technology Corporation; and Bruce Peters from Torch Technologies present "Accelerating High Energy Laser System Capability for Air and Missile Defense". Later that afternoon, E. Blair Carter and his team from the Aviation & Missile Research, Development, & Engineering Center present "A Simulation Toolkit for Rigorous Interceptor Design and Evaluation"; Northrop Grumman's Connor Wood does a second presentation on "Modeling and Simulation Integration with Hardware and Software Development"; and Mike Curry with Draper Labs finishes up with "A Unified Framework for Interactive Tradespace Exploration". ■