

AEROSPACE

Expect to See More of World's Second Largest Commercial Cargo Plane at HSV

by Kimberly Ballard /
Photography by Eric Schultz



Today, a delivery for Huntsville's aerospace industry.

Tomorrow, overly large, very heavy crucial parts and pieces for Alabama's growing automotive manufacturing industry.

As North Alabama's automotive manufacturing industry takes off, so are heavy air freight cargo planes likely to soar in and out of the Port of

Huntsville's intermodal cargo center – and we mean really, really big birds such as the Russian Antonov 124, the second largest commercial cargo plane in the world.

In recent weeks, an Antonov sat for the first time alongside Panalpina's Boeing 747-8 freighter at Huntsville International Airport.

While Panalpina operates Boe-

ing 747-8 contour freighters out of Huntsville four times a week on a fixed schedule, the Antonov provides ad hoc flights on demand from Point A to Point B from just about anywhere in the world. At least, up until now, it only flies into Huntsville a couple times a year for special, overly large deliveries, primarily for the aerospace industry.

Matthias Frey, senior vice president and global head of the Panalpina Charter Network, said that is about to change.

"Manufacturing is among Panalpina's most important industry verticals," he said. "Automotive has become a growing priority for us in the state of Alabama and we expect it to

get even bigger as they begin installing the assembly lines at the Mazda Toyota plant, and as automobiles begin rolling off that line."

Frey said Panalpina's Alabama delegation foresee a growing need for heavy cargo and air freight, especially in Huntsville and Mobile, and he said there is a need for all types of cargo aircraft to accomplish it.

"When you look, for instance at Amazon, their U.S. network uses the Boeing 767 because, although they ship tens of thousands of parcels, most of them are relatively small and stackable and they require speed," he said.

Panalpina's 747-8 is a stretch 747 that allows for higher cargo capacity and is a workhorse for standard heavy cargo.

"If you are talking about pharmaceuticals, engines, and mechanical parts, then normally you would go to a Boeing 747-8 like Panalpina," Frey said.

However, the Antonov's substantially wider body, significantly higher overhead clearance, and hinged nose opens upward for front cargo loading. Built for paradropping and cargo-handling equipment, it is also equipped with two traveling cranes, two winches, a rollgang shifting de-



vice and tiedown equipment.

Aircraft and cargo specialists compare it to the Lockheed Martin C-5 Galaxy, but it has a 25 percent higher transportation capability.

"If you are moving something tall, wide and exceptionally heavy like large machinery and components, especially if you need a wider berth or a crane and winch for loading, then you are more likely to need the Antonov with its front-loading capability," Frey said. ♦



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DEVELOPMENT

Luxury Downtown Living Comes to Madison

By Kimberly Ballard



Artist concept provided by Sealy Realty

Like Huntsville's sister property, Avenue Huntsville, Avenue Madison will offer luxury living, dining, and retail options in a small urban setting within walking distance of the historic train depot and downtown boutiques and restaurants.

"The property will be very similar to Avenue Huntsville, but there will be a few minor differences in architecture and design," said Sealy. "The courtyard and pool area will have a few new amenities that will be great additions to the Madison property."

MADISON — As Town Madison continues its urban sprawl, things are going vertical in downtown Madison.

Sealy Realty is building a 257,000 square-foot upscale mixed-used development called Avenue Madison, right in the middle of downtown.

It is less than a year until Opening Day for the Rocket City Trash Pandas and the ballpark at Town Madison. The area is already buzzing about the regional economic impact the ballpark, restaurants, hotels, shopping, and entertainment venues will have.

"The growth in Madison and the surrounding areas was definitely a part of our decision [to build there]," said Charlie Sealy, vice president of Sealy Management. "However, the main factor in building this development was the proximity to downtown Madison and its charming and historic Main Street."

"As seen nationwide, there is a true desire for living and increased activity in downtown settings. The opportunity to create a walkable, urban development linked to Main Street drove our interest in this project."

Avenue Madison will feature more than 10,000 square feet of retail space surrounded by 190 residential apartment units.

"There is a beautiful courtyard with a saltwater pool, a contemporary fire pit and patio area, a bocce ball court, and indoor/outdoor lounge with roll-up glass doors, a state-of-the-art fitness center, and galleries for socializing and events."

"The development is between Sullivan Street and Short Street and a connecting road will be built for access. There will also be 21 parallel parking spaces for retail patrons."



Avenue Madison will open in phases early next summer through late fall. Sealy expects residential leasing will start next year. Meanwhile Crunkleton & Associates is leasing restaurant, retail, and commercial space on the ground floor ♦



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Pruning Cummings Research Park Infuses Vibrancy, Marketability

By Kimberly Ballard / Photography by Eric Schultz



Rendering by Driven Capital

Any good gardener knows a first-class park requires long-term planning and seasonal pruning to ensure its vibrancy.

In 1962, Teledyne Brown Engineering (then Brown Engineering) lay deep roots on 100 acres off a dirt road that later became Sparkman Drive.

IBM, Lockheed Martin, Northrop-Grumman, and the University of Alabama-Huntsville quickly followed. Since then, Research Park's 3,843 acres of prime Huntsville real estate has been a focal point of a 50-year master plan.

Cummings Research Park has a 92 percent occupancy rate with 240 untouched acres to spare, but to better understand the growth strategy at work in the park, it is best to differentiate between Research Park East and Research Park West.

"When we talk about current growth, we mean business growth from companies within the park, especially on the west side," said Erin Koshut, the executive director of Cummings Research Park. "On the east side, market studies show we need to redevelop that area to create greater density and to replace 1960s and 1970s buildings with properties that align with today's economy. That will infuse the older section with new vibrancy.

"By doing that, we won't have to look at physical land expansion per se for a very long time."

Within the master plan are five-year work plans. The city is currently working off a plan finalized in 2016; a new plan begins in 2021. The plan acknowledges that some of the original buildings and key properties in the oldest sections of Research Park East are no longer viable in the market.

"Without the revitalization, if a company wants to go in and invest in that part of the park, they wouldn't get their return on investment," said Koshut. "That is why the zoning ordinances were changed for Research Park East - to give back some of the land to the park and to reduce economic setbacks."

Cummings Research Park East

One such property is at Bradford and Wynn drives on the former site of the St. John Paul II Catholic High School. Driven Capital Partners in California purchased the four-acre site and plans to redevelop it into a mixed-use site called Bradford Crossing.

"Article 55 of the new zoning ordinance is very specific and says if you have a retail element on the ground floor, there has to be two or more uses," said Koshut. "We cannot build a standalone gas station or drop

DEVELOPMENT

a superstore in there, but a multistory building with ground floor retail will create density on a small but efficient parcel of land.

“No decision has been made on what other uses will be included, but it could be office space, multi-family residences, a hotel, or a mixture of all three on upper floors.”

There are four big red circles marking areas of Cummings Research Park East targeted for potential mixed-use redevelopment. Currently, no groundbreaking date is set for Bradford Crossing.

“This is not just the (Huntsville-Madison County) Chamber or the city calling for these changes,” said Koshut. “We have landowners like the Olin King family at Crown Leasing who own property on Bradford Drive. They demolished the building that was on it and now have the land for sale. Business and landowners understand the flavor of changes happening in the older section of the park.”

Other recently announced redevelopments include Executive Plaza off Sparkman Drive into a multi-use facility, including an arena for the UAH hockey team and convocations; and Huntsville’s plans to donate up to \$1.8 million in land to Alabama’s third magnet school, the Alabama School of Cyber Technology and Engineering. It has a temporary home at the Tom Bevill Center on UAH’s campus, but plans are to build a permanent location in Cummings Research Park East by 2022.

“This will give the whole park along the outskirts of UAH, a big infusion of vibrancy and marketability,” said Koshut.

Cummings Research Park West

Over in Cummings Research Park West, it is not about redevelopment but about taking what is there, making it better, and expanding the footprint. In fact, Cummings Research Park West will see three major projects and numerous moderate but significant business expansions this year.

By the end of the year, Radiance Technologies will be moving into a 100,000-square-foot facility at 310 Bob Heath Drive. The new facility will consolidate operations and employees, but with significant growth, Radiance will keep its 38,000-square-foot facility on Wynn Drive in Cummings

Research Park East for a while.

The new \$45.5 million, 83,000-square-foot BAE Systems building is sprouting from a 20-acre site at Old Madison Pike and Jan Davis Drive. It is scheduled to open in 2020.

“BAE Systems has a long history with Huntsville dating back many years when they had only a couple of employees,” said Koshut. “We are proud to see them bringing in 200 employees, many new hires, and some recruited to Huntsville from the Northeast.”

Fifty-four-foot walls are going up around the \$200 million Blue Origin rocket engine production facility on Explorer Drive in July. Expected to open its doors in March 2020, Blue Origin is estimated to bring up to 300 jobs to the local economy.

Dynetics just expanded its footprint with the 78,000 square-foot Dr. Stephen M. Gilbert Advanced Manufacturing Facility; and IronMountain Solutions found a new home on Voyager Way.

“We have the first apartments, Watermark at Bridge Street Town Center, built in Research Park,” said Koshut. “They consist of two four-story buildings and 240 apartments. Over half already are leased before they open and of course a majority of those people work in Research Park.”

She said they would like to see an extension of Bridge Street Town Center or at least retail that is congruent to Bridge Street grow into the commercial retail corridor between Bridge Street’s outdoor shopping promenade and Lake 4.

It’s All for the Employees

“There is a key component of all this expansion and redevelopment,” said Koshut. “It is driven by the wants and needs of employees.

“These companies want to recruit top talent to Huntsville, and they want to retain them. They require conveniences, activities, and amenities that have been available to them in cities where they are recruited from, many bigger than Huntsville.”

This includes access luxury apartments and single-family homes in or surrounding the park; creating a sense of vibrancy and community with activities such as the Food Truck Fest that draws some 300 people a month;



free monthly happy hours in the park; and free Suzy’s Pops or Steel City Pops during the summer.

Later this summer or early fall, Koshut said the city will launch a pilot Bike Share project in Cummings Research Park West with three bike-share stations.

“As the city continues to invest in that program, we hope to connect many bike-share systems across the city so, at any time, an employee can hop on a bike and ride out to lunch,”

said Koshut. “Young people enjoy being outside and easily get tired of being stuck in an office all day. Huntsville companies are recruiting people from cities that offer a quality lifestyle amenity.”

So, as new buildings are sprouting up all over Cummings Research Park, it always helps to keep the park neatly clipped and pruned to inspire growth and opportunities among the older, well-established buildings alongside the new and flourishing. ♦

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SPACE & MISSILE SYMPOSIUM

Going Hypersonic in the Back Rooms of SMD

By Kimberly Ballard

They may not be a lead topic on the 21st Annual Space & Missile Defense Symposium agenda this month, but out in the hallways of the Von Braun Center, among exhibitors on the show floor, and over cocktails and hors d'oeuvres before every meal, people will be talking about current hypersonic missile threats from Hypersonic Glide Vehicles, sometimes referred to as Boost Glide Vehicles.

“Our near-peer adversaries and our own nation have been working on technology that will enable us, but hypersonics are not really in the mainstream of our military arsenal at this point,” said retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Kenneth Todorov, vice president of Missile Defense Solutions at Northrop Grumman Mission Systems. “They are potentially a very dangerous weapon and something that we need to take very seriously.

“The challenge for the defense industry is two-fold. One is the offensive side, that is, our nation’s capability to develop a hypersonic weapon of our own, which would help deter others from attacking us; but what will be a hot topic at SMD is the defensive hypersonic aspects we’re calling counter hypersonics.”

Todorov said that what makes hypersonic weaponry difficult for this nation’s current missile defense architecture is they fly at very fast speeds, they have very long ranges, they have maneuverability, and they are capable of looking like a traditional ballistic missile.

“A ballistic missile has a predictable trajectory and our current system can discern where an incoming missile might be headed, making it possible to intercept it or shoot it down,” he said. “A hypersonic threat could maneuver so fast and so rapidly that it outpaces our systems ability to see it, to detect it, and to intercept it.

“So that’s the real concern I think for the nation and for us as an industry as we work to come up with answers to that.”

A Quick History

Hypersonics are not new. In fact, they go back 50 years.

“We haven’t had constant focus in this area because, in the past, the U.S. was leading in that technology while, today, other countries have

made breakthroughs,” said Ragini Acharya, Hypersonic Lead at CFD Research Corp. Her company is just one of several Huntsville-based companies pioneering the offensive and defensive sides of hypersonic boost glide vehicles using their expertise in modeling and simulation.

In 1967, NASA, the Air Force, Navy, and North American Aviation Inc., joined forces to create a manned hypersonic mission called the X-15 Hypersonic Research Program. Over a 10-year period, they flew more than 200 flights and set the world’s unofficial speed and altitude records flying at 354,200 feet and at more than 4,520 mph – nearly Mach 7.

The purpose of that program was to investigate all aspects of piloted hypersonic flight, which was instrumental in the development of the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo space programs, as well as the Space Shuttle program.

“The space shuttle and re-entry methods all use hypersonics,” Acharya said. “It’s not that the older work is not valid, but we just have a lot more challenges today. For instance, those missiles were rocket-powered but, today, companies like Aerojet Rocketdyne work tirelessly on different propulsion systems to replace it.

“Also, it has to be an unmanned vehicle, and we need longer duration because they went into space and came back from space, they couldn’t work in Earth’s atmosphere for very long. We need something that can operate in Earth’s atmosphere, and that can travel from one point to another. That is where most of our challenges lie.”

Todorov said there is a lot of work remaining from the anti-missile features.

“On the defensive side, there’s a lot of hard work yet to do,” he said. “A boost glide vehicle that rides a rocket into space and then re-enters the atmosphere and glides to its target at Mach 5 to Mach 10 speeds needs an answer - that is, a defensive capability to defeat them.

“It’s going to take a wide swathe of expertise across multiple disciplines to find that answer because they are so fast, so hard to detect, and they maneuver so rapidly. The first piece of the equation is, ‘Are

you able to detect them?’, ‘Are you able to quickly identify them as a hypersonic threat?’, and ‘Are you able to see them not only through their launch, but through its flight-path, so that you can then affect the defensive solution and be able to counter them.’”

Todorov is concerned that many people think developing an interceptor is the answer but although that is true and necessary in part, it will not be sufficient.

“It’s going to take an end-to-end solution that starts before they are launched, follows them through their launch window, and is able to detect, see, track, and monitor them,” he said. “That is likely to require a space layer.

“Whenever we talk counter-hypersonics, we really have to ask, ‘what are the assets we may already have, or that we may have to supplement in the space layer, to be able to look down and see these things - to be able to detect them?’



General Kenneth Todorov,
Vice President of Missile Defense Systems

“In talking about counter-hypersonics, it’s much, much more than an interceptor.”

Space, huh? That Space Force idea begins to come a little bit more into focus does it not? ■

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TRAVEL

Frontier Brings Its Low Fares to Huntsville

By Kimberly Ballard

With a simple five-word announcement, Huntsville International Airport brought smiles to Huntsville travelers.

“... get ready for low fares,” said Rick Tucker, executive director of the Airport Authority, at the announcement that Frontier Airlines will serve the Rocket City.

Frontier Airlines will begin service in October and it will include non-stop flights from Huntsville to Denver International Airport; and the only non-stop service to Orlando International Airport.

Tucker said it is an exciting time to be here in our community and an exciting time to welcome Frontier Airlines to Huntsville.

“Known as an ultra, low-cost carrier, Frontier is going to be a tremendous benefit to everyone in our community,” Tucker said. “For

business travelers and especially for leisure travelers – get ready for low fares!”

The announcement was made in front of more than a hundred people on hand for the “Big Reveal” in the airport’s main terminal,

“We are proud to bring our unique brand of ‘Low Fares Done Right’ to the Rocket City,” said Stephen Shaw, spokesman for Frontier Airlines. “Frontier’s new flights to Denver and Orlando will make air travel more accessible and affordable for everyone in Huntsville and northern Alabama.

“We look forward to making it easier for people to fly, and for people to fly more often.”

“This partnership is important to us because it fills a specific void for a low-cost carrier for our leisure travelers at HSV,” said Betty

Fletcher, chairman of the board for Huntsville International Airport. “It is no secret that Huntsville has a lot of expendable income in the market, it also it is a known fact that we have a lot of very frugal engineers that have demanded fair, competitive, comparable fares.”

“We can be certain that our community will respond well to and support Frontier Airlines.”

The Frontier Airlines network serves more 80 cities in the U.S., Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. Frontier has more than 1,000 nonstop and connecting routes.

“Couple that with stability, structure, and an excellent track record for supporting low cost carriers, and you have a recipe for success,” Shaw said.

For information, visit flyfrontier.com and flyhuntsville.com. ■



Rick Tucker, Executive Director of the Airport Authority

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ChopChop Expands *Fresh Seasonal Salad* *Cuisine Into South* Huntsville

By Kimberly Ballard

A fresh look is in store for the soon-to-open Shops at Merchants Square. ChopChop Fresh Salads is expanding its Huntsville franchise and joining the tenant lineup at the retail/restaurant destination nestled between Parkway Place and the Whole Foods-anchored Shops at Merchants Walk.

Focusing on fresh, seasonal salad bowls, ChopChop originally opened on University Drive at University Place in October 2016.

After spending two years expanding the menu, perfecting the food preparation and utilizing more local partners for providing fresh ingredients, the 1,554 square-foot restaurant will offer more than double the seating of the University Drive location. ChopChop will also introduce a select menu of local beers, kombuchas and Piper & Leaf artisanal teas.

Located between the upcoming Char Restaurant and locally owned Brass Tap craft beer bar, ChopChop at Merchants Square is scheduled to open in February.

“Many people are asking for healthier options that support local producers and benefit the body,” said Yunus Hasan, co-owner of ChopChop. “Many of our customers asked us to open up a shop near South Huntsville.

“We listened, and we will be bringing the same quality food and excellent customer service to Merchants Square that we are known for on University Drive.”

The menu includes several signature salad bowls with various greens, warm grains and toppings. Guests can also create their own custom bowls with ingredients such as kale, chicken, quinoa and dressings, which are made in-house daily.

Co-owner Jim Xue said the Merchants Square location will better serve professionals who are looking to have a quick, sit-down lunch on the south end of town.

“Many of the shops at this location share our target demographic, and the site matches the atmosphere we were going for,” said Xue. “We’re also able to add beer and draft kombucha to our offerings, which is a big plus for customers who are fans of local brews.”

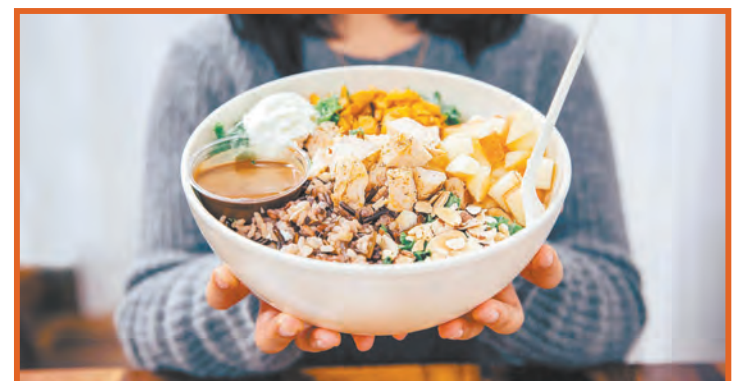
The owners do not consider ChopChop a “health food” restaurant, but they do try to make customers aware of nutritional benefits, and they use organic products when they are readily available.

Everything from its sleek interiors to the store music is carefully chosen to elicit a vibe that is compatible with tasty, garden-fresh fare.

“ChopChop offers a very unique product for the North Alabama area,” said Crunkleton Commercial Real Estate Leasing Agent Anusha Alapati. “Merchants Square was the ideal spot for their second location because of the co-tenants and great accessibility.

“This new shop will help them serve more of Huntsville and share their vision for healthy, delicious food.” ❄️

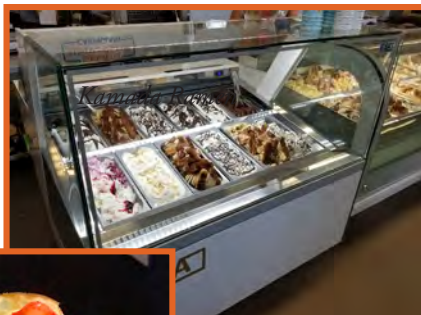
CHOPCHOP
FRESH SALADS



DINING

Something **Delicious** *is* Cooking *at* **Stovehouse**

By Kimberly Ballard

Mazzara Italian Kitchen*Oh Crêpe**Kamado Ramen*

In case you haven't noticed, there is something moving around over at the century-old Martin Stove Factory, and we are sure it is not the ghosts of Charles and W.H. Martin, transitioning wood-burning stoves into electric ranges and cast-iron skillets.

However, there is definitely something cooking in the old stove plant at 3414 Governors Drive in west Huntsville that promises to satisfy that itch you often get – you know, the one where you are craving something out of the ordinary to eat and a unique atmosphere in which to enjoy it?

Danny and Patti Yancey purchased the old Martin Brother's stove plant facility in 2016 to preserve its rich history. Danny is a Huntsville history buff and 30-year veteran of construction and finance. Together with Crunkleton Commercial Real Estate Group, they are developing the 200,000 square foot building situated on a 10-acre property into a thriving large-scale food, office, events, and entertainment complex surrounding a hub of eclectic cuisine that showcases the talents of local restaurateurs and chefs.

"Stovehouse will blur the line between modern and historical, work and play, and small-town culture and high-tech urban energy," said Yancey. "The food garden is the heart of Stovehouse. It's where the city can mingle, enjoy live music, play games, and experience

some of the best food Huntsville has to offer."

Several local restaurateurs and chefs will be opening unique dining concepts in the food garden, beginning with Kamado Ramen, Oh Crêpe, Pourhouse, and Mazzara's Italian Kitchen.

Kamado Ramen and Oh Crêpe are Japanese-inspired eateries, both members of Huntsville and Madison's I Love Sushi restaurant team.

Coincidentally, Kamado means "stove" in Japanese and they will feature several bowl options that include various noodles, sauces, vegetables and meats. All sauces will be made in-house and patrons can enjoy dishes that showcase pork belly, chicken breast, kimchi, deep fried pork, and Japanese soft-boiled eggs.

General manager Chao Fang said, "Kamado will be hyper-focused on creating the highest quality ramen dishes in the area. A lot goes into creating exceptional ramen and our goal is to be the place everyone immediately thinks of when someone mentions ramen in Huntsville."

Jim Xue, partner at Kamado Ramen and Oh Crêpe, said, "Huntsville is very progressive when it comes to accepting new and exciting restaurants to the area. When it came to selecting a site, Stovehouse fit our needs on every level. We are very excited to be a part of it."

Oh Crêpe will offer a fun spin on traditional crêpes using Japanese flavors and ingredients like banana, green tea ice cream and chocolate, or savory selections like lobster, chicken and spinach. The crêperie will also offer Taiwanese-style shaved ice cream along with several toppings.

General manager Yituan Wang said, "You can completely change the look and taste of crêpes depending on what flour you use. Oh Crêpe will use Japanese rice flour, and pay special attention to the presentation. We can't wait for people to see how beautiful our crêpes look and discover how wonderful they taste."

The creators of Church Street Wine Shoppe and Purveyor have committed to opening Pourhouse, an eclectic upscale bar; and Mazzara's Italian Kitchen at the Stovehouse Food Garden next year as well.

"We like to think that if Purveyor had a little sister, Pourhouse would be in her place," said Stephanie Kennedy-Mell, the pub's co-owner and creator. "Pourhouse will be a bohemian, laid-back, upscale and 'comfortably swanky' bar with unique touches not yet seen in Huntsville. Customers can grab a drink and enjoy the rooftop deck or one of our heated outdoor patios, complete with fireplace. It will be at the center of everything at Stovehouse."

Pourhouse will serve a wide selection of wines; domestic, international and local craft beers; spirits; and hand-crafted cocktails. Although no food will be served at the bar, guests are welcome to bring food from the eateries over to the Pourhouse area and enjoy

their meal with their favorite Pourhouse selection.

Serving fresh, made-in-house pasta, sauces, and other traditional Italian fare, Mazzara's Italian Kitchen will feature primarily Mazzara family recipes. They have been passed down for generations to owner Stephanie Kennedy-Mell, from her great-grandparents, Stefano and Carmela Mazzara, who were Italian cooks from Sicily.

"Mazzara is my family name and our menu may feature favorites like chicken parmigiana and lasagna as staples, but my great-grandmother's eggplant rollatini will be something everyone will be watching for," she said. "Service and quality are our trademarks at the Church Street Family and this will be fast, casual service with the high-quality food our customers have come to expect from us."

Managed by Chef Rene Boyzo of Purveyor, Mazzara's will also feature Guistino's Gelato, a made-from-scratch gelateria created by Huntsville local, Justin Rosoff.

Rosoff took classes in Bologna, Italy, to craft artisanal hard and soft-serve gelato, pastries, and gelato pops. All gelato will be made in small batches on premise, so guests can watch Justin create the desserts in person. Patrons can also enjoy seasonal sorbets, biscotti, rainbow cookies, almond cookies and Italian coffee. Dairy- and gluten-free options will be available.

All four eateries are scheduled to open in March 2019.

"Stovehouse is the perfect backdrop for these new concepts from Matt and Stephanie," said Crunkleton Commercial Real Estate Principal Wesley Crunkleton. "The Food Garden will allow guests to experience delicious authentic food from different destinations around the world, and the Church Street team has a proven track record of success when it comes to creating concepts that Huntsville embraces." ❄️

Artist's rendition of Stovehouse

BANKING / FINANCIAL

Bank Independent, Alabama's Sixth- Largest Bank, Opens in Madison

Written By Kimberly Ballard | Photography by Steve Babin

MADISON – After nearly a decade, the time proved right and Bank Independent celebrated the grand opening of its Madison branch Nov. 13 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house.

Area President Tim Singleton said they are excited about becoming part of the Madison community.

“We have owned the Madison property for 10 years and have been waiting for the right time and circumstance to open there,” he said. “This year, we are celebrating 70 years in the banking business and this will be our 29th location in North Alabama.”

The branch is at the corner of Nance Road and U.S. 72. The bank's management team and branch staff joined Angelina Pettway, vice president and sales officer, in welcoming visitors and showing them around the newly-completed facility.



“The new Madison branch provides state-of-the-art digital banking services while holding firm to Bank Independent's philosophy of delivering unsurpassed personal service,” said Pettway. “We are looking forward to a long relationship with the people of Madison.”

Headquartered in Sheffield, Bank Independent is the sixth largest bank in Alabama with \$1.6 billion in assets. There is also a branch at 132 Holmes Avenue in downtown Huntsville.

Macke Mauldin, President and CEO of BancIndependent Inc., spoke about the bank's commitment to the communities it serves.

“We are thrilled to be a part of the innovative and thriving community of

Madison,” Mauldin said. “Our mission is to make a positive difference in people's lives, so we are excited not just to provide banking services to this community, but to be an active participant in making it an even better place to live and work.”

Customers will recognize Bank Independent's signature



Williamsburg architecture, which is consistent with their other locations.

However, hoping to attract clientele from Research Park and the technology companies there, they will be offering a more contemporary atmosphere for doing business.

Upon entering the bank, customers will find modern amenities such as a Tech Bar with secure iPads for customer use, and a refreshment center with coffee, water, and snacks.

In addition, each team member is prepared to provide assistance with any banking need. Without leaving their vehicles, customers can take advantage of the branch's drive-thru hours of 8 a.m. – 8 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

“For over 70 years, Bank Independent has focused on providing the latest conveniences to our customers while maintaining an exceptional level of

personal service,” said CEO Rick Wardlaw. “We believe technology is an enabler of great personal service, not a substitute for it. We are excited to be able to bring a combination of the latest banking technology and our genuine passion for customer service to Madison.” ✨





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EDUCATION

Business Community Raises \$180,000 For Local Teachers

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photos Steve Babin

Nothing inspires a business community like a clear-cut mission and a high return on investment.

In a celebration at Burritt on the Mountain, the Huntsville Committee of 100 and more than 200 regional business owners, elected officials, local school boards and superintendents, and state representatives, celebrated raising over \$180,000 to fund new National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) within the Huntsville City, Madison City, and Madison County school systems.

Believing there is a direct link between quality education and a skilled workforce, it was just six months ago that the Huntsville Committee of 100 uncovered statistics showing that for every \$1



invested in National Board Certified Teachers there is a \$31 return on that investment.

“Research shows that National Board Certification for teachers is the key to driving aca-

ademic achievement in our local schools,” said Committee of 100 CEO John Allen. “The Committee’s philanthropic arm, the Creative Cities Fund, teamed up the Schools Foundation to fund certification for 100 teachers from the three local school systems, and tonight we applaud that achievement.”

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards reports that this initiative is the first and largest effort nationwide by the business community to fund National Board-Certified teachers in public schools.

On average, students taught by

National Board Certified Teachers show gains of one to two months of learning over students in other classrooms.

Alabama State Superintendent, Dr. Eric Mackey honored the efforts by video feed while the Huntsville Youth Orchestra entertained guests and Madison County High School culinary students prepared the cuisine.

“This is just the beginning,” said Stephanie Lowe, director of engagement with the Huntsville Committee of 100. “While driving to hit the \$200,000 goal, both organizations will continue conversations to make this a focus across our state, as achievement in education continues to be a priority in all parts of Alabama.”

The Creative Cities Fund focuses on smart, creative ideas that stimulate economic growth. Over the last five years, they have funded many initiatives including Launch 2035 regional visioning; land use planning such as the Singing River Trail; Downtown Huntsville Blue-Bikes; and peer-to-peer counseling in local high schools.

The NBCT Campaign is the fund’s largest campaign to date. ♦

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Pictured L to R: Linda Akenhead, Leah Gradi, John Allen, Elizabeth Fleming, Stephanie Lowe



AEROSPACE CONTRACTING

Kutta and Sierra Nevada Creating 'Melting Technology Pot and Integration Model'

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photo by Kimberly Ballard

With the opening of its new facility, Kutta Technologies plans to implement what they and the Sierra Nevada Corp. call their first integration model here in Huntsville.

When Sierra Nevada acquired Kutta Technologies in 2015, Kutta was a small avionics consulting company that develops controller software for Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for the United States military.

As that demand grew, Sierra Nevada saw an opportunity to expand that expertise into its Integrated Missions Systems business in Huntsville. Now a wholly owned subsidiary of Sierra Nevada, Kutta has 65 employees and is growing.

The new location at 4000 Market Street in the new Redstone Gateway, just steps outside Redstone Arsenal Gate 9, will help Kutta increase its presence and footprint on Redstone Arsenal.

"Sierra Nevada is a very innovative company with four business groups," said Tim Owings, executive vice president of Integrated Missions Systems for Sierra Nevada. "Our space team is involved in the development of the Dreamchaser, so we are building our own spacecraft. In aviation we have our own surveillance aircraft; we have people here involved in electronic warfare; and we have people working in cyber.

"All those intersect here in Huntsville ... a sort of melting technology pot and integration model for Sierra Nevada that we are all really excited about."

For the past eight years, Kutta has shared space on Discovery Drive with Sierra Nevada. Owings said they have built great new friendships and great working relationships during that time.

"Kutta is on a roll right now and we owe that to Tim Owings and Sierra Nevada, who have made it possible," said Matt Savoca, executive vice president of Kutta and one of the company's founders. "UAS is one of our biggest customers and



Ribbon cutting at the opening of the new Kutta Technologies

they along with our vendors are on Redstone Arsenal. Our software controls all of the small and large unmanned vehicles at Redstone and it has been a passion of ours to expand our unmanned aerial systems capabilities in Huntsville.

"We are excited and proud to be part of the Huntsville community."

According to Owings, some more big announcements concerning Kutta and SNC are upcoming.

"The next part of all this is – you have to win some work! Sometimes timing is everything, and last week we saw an announcement about two major programs we have been selected to win," he said.

"One is a very large program hatched out of the United Kingdom that we will be doing work for out of this office; but more important locally is the EMARSS-E contract with L3 Technologies."

The Enhanced Medium Altitude Reconnaissance and Surveillance System (EMARSS-E) contract is an aircraft integration contract to develop up to two EMARSS prototype aircraft. Owings said the initial contract award is around \$30 million.

"If we are going to build airplanes in our Huntsville hangar in Meridianville, we are also going to support them engineering-wise," Owings said. "The program office for that will be run from Huntsville

so that's a big deal towards what we are trying to achieve here. However, there is a lot of aircraft follow-on from that contract that has the po-

tential for hundreds of millions of dollars over time as we provide more of these platforms."

The Huntsville office hosted Sierra Nevada's quarterly technology meeting and, according to Owings, the entire Sierra Nevada senior leadership was expected to attend.

Savoca and Owings also gave a shout-out to the Huntsville-Madison County Chamber of Commerce who presented them with a new membership plaque.

"The Chamber always does a fabulous job with these things and is supportive of everything we've done," said Savoca. "The entire city and its culture have really embraced what we want to do, so 'Thank You.' ♦

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SMALL BUSINESS

Madison Chamber of Commerce Celebrates Best in Business 2019 Awards

By Kimberly Ballard

MADISON — Just as Madison is growing and evolving, so are the categories for the annual Madison Chamber of Commerce Best in Business Awards.

More than a dozen businesses were recognized at this year's dinner and awards presentation at the Insanity Complex Entertainment Center. The event was sponsored by the Madison Chamber and Good Samaritan Hospice.

The evening was capped off with Janine Nesin of Nesin Therapy Services being awarded the Excellence in Leadership & Service Award. Cassie Scott of the Quadrus Corp. was runner-up.

According to Pam Honeycutt, executive director of the Madison Chamber, the awards categories are evolving every year to better re-



fect the growth and diversity of the Chamber membership.

"We added arts, entertainment and hospitality categories to the awards this year, and we added a new Culinary Student Program sponsorship, presented by Earfinity,"

said Honeycutt. "A \$500 check was awarded to Madison City Schools Culinary Program instructor Monica Creekmore for their service to the Chamber throughout the year."

The winners were Signalink for Best Business of the Year; Capital Management Services for Best Start-up Business of the Year; Mosaic Audio Video Integration for Best Small Business of the Year; and Union Chapel Christian Academy for Best Nonprofit of the Year.

Conditioned Air Solutions; Black Patch Distilling Co.; Air Essentials; and Big Brothers/Big Sisters of North Alabama took runner-up in each category respectively.

Daniel Kasambira of Hogan Family YMCA won Community Servant of the Year with Michelle Linville of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of North Ala-

bama the finalist.

Health and Wellness Business of the Year went to Hot Yoga DeLux & Cryotherapy with Madison Health Mart Pharmacy taking second place. The Dessert Fork won the Culinary Business of the Year with Insanity Complex the runner-up.

Compass Physical Therapy took first place as Medical Practice of the Year; Conditioned Air Solutions won for Essential Service Business of the Year; and Signalink won Professional Service Business of the Year. Good Samaritan Hospice of Madison; Turf Tamer; and Two Men and a Truck were finalists in each of those categories.

In the new Arts, Entertainment & Hospitality category, iHeartMedia took the top prize while Insanity Complex was runner-up. ♦

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SMALL BUSINESS

Madison's Best in 'Buss-iness': The Physical Therapist, The Technology Specialist, A Shared Kiss, and Two Awards

By Kimberly Ballard

The 2019 Madison Chamber of Commerce Best in Business Awards may have been the most romantic awards presentation ever.

It is tradition that the winner of the previous year's Best in Business Award in each category, present the trophy to the winner of the current year's Best in Business award.

However, when Stephanie Johnson, owner of Compass Physical Therapy, presented Michael Johnson, owner of Mosaic Audio Video Integration, with his Small Business of the Year trophy this year, she also gave him a big kiss, much to the "oohs" and "ahhs" of a flabbergasted audience!

"Boy, I wish I had won that award," someone in the audience piped up to uproarious laughter.

Few in the audience realized at the time that Stephanie and Michael Johnson are married, and both own award-winning small businesses in Madison. Earlier that evening, Stephanie accepted a trophy for the Best Medical Practice – less the kiss of course!

"I was thrilled to have been nominated but I never expected to win because the Small Business of the Year category is very competitive," said Michael Johnson. "I was excited and honored to have won among so many deserving businesses here in our community."

Johnson has been in the home automation business for over 20 years, but five years ago broke away to form his own company. Specializing in whole home and office automation including smart lighting, motorized window shades, multi-room music and audio, home theatre, cameras and surveillance, as well as Wi-Fi networks for home and office conference rooms, Johnson said he wears the nickname "The Speaker Guy" as a badge of honor.

"People automatically think about what we do in terms of surround-sound and home theatre, but that is just a small part of what we can do," he said. "If it's technology-based electronics



Pictured: Michael Johnson owner of Mosaic Audio Video Integration and Stephanie Johnson, owner of Compass Physical Therapy

and automation, Mosaic Audio Video Integration can help you design and install it."

In addition to residential, Mosaic does a lot of commercial work for companies in Research Park. He said Huntsville and Madison are great markets for technology-based systems because it is a well-educated community where people are in tune with what is available.

Stephanie has been a licensed physical therapist for nearly 15 years but bought the business six years ago, renaming it Compass Physical Therapy in 2017. She specializes in physical therapy for children age 1 to 18 and includes rehabilitation for special needs children, traumatic pediatric injuries and rehab for school athletics and other injuries resulting from physical activities.

"Alabama is a 'direct access' state so anyone can come in and get evaluated without a doctor's prescription; however, some insurance may require that you get some form of medical preauthorization," Stephanie said. "If needed, we communicate with the doctor after they come in and let them know what is going on."

Compass Physical Therapy is also engaged with the local schools. Madison Schools have health advisory boards in which they invite professionals in engineering, IT, and the medical

fields into their classrooms to talk to students who are interested in those fields. Stephanie speaks to students and fields questions from them about prepping a career in physical therapy.

"Compass also accommodates student observation hours in the physical therapy field," she said. "Students interested in pursuing a career in physical therapy, or who may be looking to go to college or physician's assistant's school, need observation hours," said Stephanie. "the high schools are aware that we host students here so they can get their observation hours. It can help advance their professional careers."

She said they also take on student interns when they can. "It's our way of helping perpetuate the next generation of physical therapists."

Michael's expertise is on full display at Stephanie's practice.

"Music and special lighting are important to inspiring and keeping children engaged during the rehabilitation process," Stephanie said. "Michael has installed smart lighting and music in some of our work areas that can be adjusted from a tablet-like remote."

From a businessowner's standpoint, she said her favorite feature is the one-button access to opening and closing her business every day.



"In the morning when I arrive, I usually have my hands full and all I have to do is push one button and the door unlocks and opens. It turns on the lights and brings up our favorite TV station in the waiting room. When we

leave at night, I push one button and it turns off the lights, sets the thermostat, and locks the door behind me,"

"Stephanie's work with special needs children has a profound effect on people's lives. She comes home at night talking about how she helped a baby learn to walk today," said Michael. "I implemented home automation technology in the master bathroom of a wealthy homeowner that day, so I like to believe that good stuff rubs off on me just a little."

Clearly it does.

Three years ago, the Johnsons began hosting a joint annual fundraiser called Blues, Brews and Booze in which they choose a local charity for which they raise money. Among those charities are Kids to Love, Clothe Our Kids of North Alabama and BeArded Warriors.

"It's important because the local Madison community has been so great to us," said Stephanie. "We try find ways we can give back to the community and reach out to people who need help, It has grown from just a handful of supporters three years ago to over 4,000 participants this year."

Both of the Johnsons give a shout-out to the Madison Chamber of Commerce.

"The Chamber brings Madison small businesses together for networking opportunities, and they really get the business community talking to each other, making it easier to work together when needed," said Stephanie.

"Madison is a friendly Chamber, involved and engaged with all businesses in our area," said Michael.

"We get together on a regular basis to network and help each other grow. It really is a community effort and we are fortunate the Madison Chamber is so supportive of small business." ♦

SPORTS / BUSINESS

Huntsville's Winning Sports Strategy: Build It and They Will Come

By Kimberly Ballard

It's all about attracting more visitors to Huntsville and the unspoken strategy so far has been very successful: Build it and they will come.

The city built a \$22 million Huntsville Aquatic Center and it has attracted national swim competitions and swim events since it opened in 2017.

Huntsville has a prestigious swimming history, and when the Aquatic Center replaced the old Brahan Spring Park Natatorium, it was designed to pay tribute to great Huntsville swimmers of the past, such as olympians John Piersma and Margaret Hoelzer.

Known for its light and happy atmosphere, the Aquatic Center seats 1,400 spectators and features a high-tech ventilation system that keeps chlorine fumes at a minimum. The facility has two 50-meter competition pools; the original natatorium Legacy Pool used for swim instruction, competition training, and as a therapy pool; and the original dive well for diving competitions, all under one roof.

Parents from more than a dozen swim groups have visited the Aquatic Center. The Huntsville



"The Huntsville Aquatics Center hosted three major swim meets with measurable economic impact of more than \$3.5 million in eight months"

Swim Association is expected to bring in three or four potential new events; and in 2019, at least two swim competition organizations have made visits and are considering Huntsville for their upcoming events.

"The Huntsville Aquatics Center hosted three major swim meets with measurable economic impact of more than \$3.5 million in eight months," said Mark McCarter, Conven-



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SPORTS / BUSINESS

tion Sales Manager at the Huntsville/Madison Convention & Visitors Bureau and author of the Huntsville City Blog, “The impact shows up in visitor lodging, meals, shopping, and other purchases.”

The Southeastern Short Course Swimming Championships, for example, brought in 1,100 swimmers with a delegation of 90 from the Huntsville Swim Association. The Southeastern Long Course meet led to a \$1.5 million economic impact; while the Jack Frost Invitational brought more than \$550,000 into the economy. Visitors from those events spent 3,600 nights in local hotels and motels.

From water to ice, Huntsville has a legacy with hockey and figure skating dating to 1963. Huntsville built the Benton H. Wilcoxon Municipal Ice Complex on Leeman Ferry Road some 16 years ago. It is used for figure skating, hockey, curling and public skating. The Huntsville Havoc and UAH Chargers hockey teams use the Iceplex as their practice rink.

The facility has hosted national and regional competitions in figure skating and hockey, drawing thousands over the years to Huntsville.

McCarter will partner with Ralph Stone, executive director of the Huntsville Sports Commission, to represent Huntsville at a half-dozen national shows in 2019, where sports and event organizations seek world-class sites and facilities for hosting their events.

“A lot of hard work goes into reaching out to

these groups, but once they see Huntsville’s unique facilities, they want to come here, and there is a discernible economic impact to them doing so,” said McCarter.

The Rocket City Trash Pandas are building a \$46 million baseball stadium for 2020, and if current enthusiasm is any key, people will come from all over North Alabama to see the team play and spend money on tickets, concessions, and team wearables.

Over at John Hunt Park, a \$9 million park renovation is underway on a multi-sports complex designed to attract world-class cross-country races. The tracks will have multiple configurations that will accommodate a 10k race for men and women at the high school and collegiate level.

There will be a rugged, four-mile mountain bike trail that accommodates competition; new competition-level soccer fields; and an 18-hole disc golf course.

The Huntsville Tennis Center with its six hard courts and 24 clay courts will be getting an additional six hard courts to boost the Center’s current propensity for attracting tennis tournaments.

Furthermore, now that beach volleyball is an Olympic and NCAA sport, John Hunt Park will get a \$3.6 million beach volleyball court project with 12 “beach” courts. As a carrot to attract beach volleyball tournaments, they will be

building a 150 foot-by-30-foot pavilion, locker rooms, concession stands, and spectator amenities, which add an extra incentive for attracting cross-country and volleyball events to the facility.

While there are two soccer fields at John Hunt Park, there will soon be two more. However nearby Merrimack Park has 12 soccer fields and is popular with youth and church group meets. Merrimack is also getting four lacrosse fields with artificial turf and a new field house that will open in the spring.

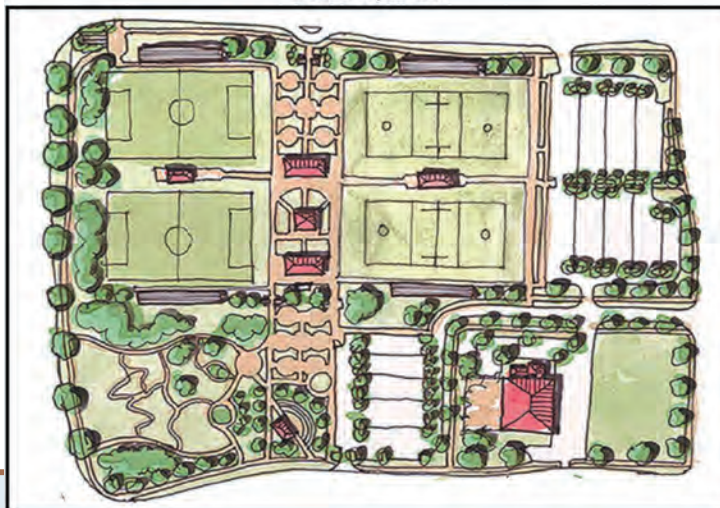
Finally, movies such “Game of Thrones” and “The Hunger Games” have sparked a growing interest in archery. The Alabama Department of Natural Resources and Conservation funded 80 percent of the Huntsville Community Archery Park at Southside Park on Chaney Thompson Road. The Madison County Commission provided the remaining 20 percent funding and Huntsville City is responsible for the general maintenance of the facility.

“From a sports commission standpoint, it will help us meet our mission,” said Stone. “We hope to host competitions that bring individuals into Huntsville to drive economic impact.”

With sports organizations actively looking for sophisticated facilities and stable supporting infrastructure for their competitions, Huntsville’s quality of life standard is reflected in our facilities, enticing competitive sports events to Huntsville – if they will just build it!

Championship Soccer/Lacrosse Complex

Future Expansion



“A lot of hard work goes into reaching out to these groups, but once they see Huntsville’s unique facilities, they want to come here, and there is a discernible economic impact to them doing so,”

“We hope to host competitions that bring individuals into Huntsville to drive economic impact.”



Photos and Plans of John Hunt Park



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Think Madison Has Changed Dramatically in the Past Decade? You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet!

By Kimberly Ballard

MADISON — The City of Madison adopted a long-term master growth plan in 2012 that looked at key development or opportunity areas where it should invest its energies in infrastructure, and advocate for private investment.

Today, many of those major target areas such as Town Madison, the U.S. 72 corridor and County Line Road are marching toward completion.

“A long-range plan like the one we adopted took two years to put together and typically has a shelf life of ten to twenty years, depending on the City,” said Mary Beth Broeren, director of Development Services for Madison. “This was not a full, comprehensive plan update like that one significantly updated in 2008, but in 2012, was a targeted look at areas where the city could affect change and get a positive economic return.

“In three years, the Town Madison will become Town Madison; a lot of County Line Road will be filled in; and it will be time to reassess things and

ultimately update the full comprehensive plan to reflect all the changes. Let's face it, Madison has changed dramatically in 11 years.”

While Madison Mayor Paul Finley's State of the City address last month focused solely on what to see from Town Madison in 2019, there are several road improvements and infrastructure projects in the works for 2019.



Madison Mayor Paul Finley addresses attendees at the National Cyber Summit (cir 2017)

Madison will continue to widen portions of Hughes Road with turn lane improvements onto Browns Ferry Road and the new Publix at that intersection. Sullivan Street will be widened from Madison Boulevard up to Keyser Street in preparation for downtown's new Avenue Madison, a multipurpose development underway between Sullivan and Short Streets.

The widening of Zierdt Road to four lanes is almost complete from Madison Boulevard to Martin Road, but the construction of multi-lane interchanges

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outside Redstone Arsenal Gate 7 at Martin Road West are still underway.

In terms of infrastructure, the city is building a multi-use walking path on one side of Wall Triana from Mill Road up to Gooch Place in a heavily residential area that really needs it.

And city officials are excited about a new greenway in the early stages of development in the far west part of the city. It will be called the Oakland Spring Branch Greenway and reaches into an area where there is new residential growth.

In the meantime, there is construction all over the city.

Champy's World Famous Fried Chicken is renovating the old Bison's Café on Madison Boulevard in front of Publix at the Zierdt Road intersection. The family-friendly concept out of Chattanooga has a full bar and two expanded open patios for outdoor dining, serving southern fried chicken, buttermilk-fried pickles, and Mississippi Delta homemade hot tamales with coleslaw and crackers. They will open in April.

Family Security Credit Union is building a location on Madison Boulevard, just west of Faith Memorial Park Cemetery. They will be moving from their location on Lime Quarry Road.

SportsMed Orthopedic is about to break ground on a 20,000 square-foot facility on Hughes Road, a great addition to that area, which has become a successful medical core for Madison with several medical offices, buildings, and private medical and dental practices surrounding them.

Sometimes referred to as the Downtown Madison Sealy Project, a new multiuse development modeled after The Avenue in downtown Huntsville will facilitate a huge expansion of downtown on the south side of Main Street. A Huntsville Utilities sub-station at that location is currently being dismantled, and a new one is being built on the other side of the street.

The 226,415 square-foot upscale mixed-used Avenue Madison development will provide 174 luxury apartments and nearly 9,000 square feet of retail space on the north side of Sullivan Street. A connector road will create easy access between Short Street and Sullivan Street and include 21 additional parallel parking spaces for retail patrons.

Downtown Madison, which has previously offered very little in terms of apartment leasing, will offer luxury living, dining, and retail options in the



heart of downtown within walking distance of the historic downtown train depot.

Expect there to be a lot of activity throughout 2019 at Madison's premier Town Madison development.

As construction continues on the \$46 million Trash Pandas baseball stadium, there will be dozens of ground-breaking and "Opening Soon" events at the 563-acre development this year. With 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 to fill – we will be watching as Madison's skyline continues to evolve and the \$100 million worth of new road construction needed to accommodate takes shape!

"It is a good problem to have but a challenge nonetheless, that we have a shortage of contractors, electricians, and other construction-related labor in our area because of all the development," said Broeren, "The bad news is that prices have gone up because there is so much work available, but getting bids and tapping into the jobs and labor pool is getting harder as there are just not enough laborers out there to do the work."

"It really affects small businesses who need tenant improvements or for property owners looking to build, remodel, or renovate. The shortage slows those projects down and it can be frustrating," Broeren said. "And when we look at those monster-sized Toyota facilities just getting started, you have to ask, 'Where will they get all the electricians they will need?'"

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DEVELOPMENT

Huntsville West: A Coworking Community That Just Happened to Be Used as a School for 50 Years

By Kimberly Ballard



Passions run high when neighborhood schools face retirement.

Residents and alumni get emotional reminiscing about passing notes in science class, sneaking their first kiss behind the bleachers, gossiping with friends around the lockers, and cramming for pop quizzes in the library.

Unlike an old warehouse or aging office building, most schools face an uncertain future. Their unique layout makes gutting the building and converting it into a retail store or apartment building impractical.

As an alternative to demolition, old schools usually sell for pennies on the dollar and sit useless and abandoned for many years.

Huntsville, however, is not like most cities.

When Huntsville City Schools retired more than 700,000 square feet of school space a few years ago, Huntsville's serial entrepreneurs used their tenaciously innovative spirit and ingenuity to find pragmatic solutions for this otherwise wasteful real estate.

Several successful projects have been born from repurposing abandoned schools.

Huntsville developer Randy Schrimsher converted the Butler High School/Stone Middle School built in 1951 into downtown Huntsville's premier brewery and entertainment center, Campus 805.

The Huntsville Madison County Public Library Foundation (HMCPL) bought the original Virgil I. Grissom High School on Bailey Cove

West Huntsville Elementary School on 9th Avenue.

He planned to convert it into a low overhead small business incubator he refers to as "a flop-house for entrepreneurs" called the Huntsville West Coworking Community. Almost a year later, Kruse purchased the vacant Westlawn Middle School, just down the street from West Huntsville, for \$650,000 for similar repurposing.

While Westlawn is currently home to the Huntsville Achievement Academy, it is only 20 percent completed, and will have a big agenda in 2019.

Huntsville West on the other hand is proving to be very successful and, if not for the variety of memberships and leasing options available, on any given day it sits at 100 percent occupancy.

According to Community Manager Demetrius Malone, Huntsville West caters to startup technology companies, entrepreneurs, freelancers, and creative professionals who have limited resources and need flexibility. Among the current tenants you will find a diverse community of software developers, Google Fiber technicians, Disney engineers, data security firms, nonprofit organizations, and mentoring and consulting services.

"One of the ways we offer flexibility is through a variety of affordable memberships and low-cost all-inclusive month-to-month leasing options," Malone said. "Research shows that among startup businesses and entrepreneurs, there is a real fear of sustainability on a long-term office space lease. This undue stress becomes a distraction

"One of the ways we offer flexibility is through a variety of affordable memberships and low-cost all-inclusive month-to-month leasing options"

Road and is currently repurposing it into the Sandra Moon Community Complex and new Huntsville Library.

Twenty-nine-year-old Brandon Kruse is a technological magnate.

By the age of 24, he had already built and sold a successful telecommunications company. In 2014, he used \$500,000 of those proceeds to buy a shuttered



"We have many ways for you to benefit from joining our community"

DEVELOPMENT

when the focus should be on growing the business or getting a product or service to market.”

Although Huntsville West has a waiting list for the 35 or 40 redesigned “classrooms” acting as individual offices and studios along the hallways, there is much more to Huntsville West than private offices.

“We have many ways for you to benefit from joining our community,” said Malone.

In fact, a large segment of the Huntsville West Coworking Community doesn’t have private offices at all. The community’s basic membership starts at \$150 and gives the member access to all the common areas, coworking lounge, conference rooms, and break rooms with vending machines and hot coffee. If someone does not have an office but needs privacy, there are comfortable nooks and corners where you can work in private, or large open areas where people can gather around a table with others to socialize and collaborate.

Office space starts at \$550 a month and go up to \$950 a month for a large studio. Utilities, Internet and 24/7 access are included.

One level of membership includes one of Huntsville West’s larger shared offices where two or three people can work. It isn’t quite a private

“Corporations have saved a lot of overhead by downsizing office facilities and allowing their employees to work at remote locations”

office but allows you a private desk and the ability to leave your work and personal belongings overnight without having to carry them back and forth from home.

Huntsville West also offers day passes for potential members to try out the facilities; as well as a 5-day pass for \$50 a month to use those five days anytime during a 30-day period. Membership comes with an app for your smartphone that tracks your time.

The concept for coworking space is less than 20 years old, but in many ways, it has saved much of the nation’s job force, said Malone.

“Corporations have saved a lot of overhead by downsizing office facilities and allowing their employees to work at remote locations,” he said. “It is also ideal for start-ups because we offer them all types of professional guidance and advice, as well as resources to give them a boost and help them step-by-step achieve their dreams.”

Sometimes coffee shops and restaurants are too loud; many places have limited Internet access; and working at home can be distracting, said Malone.

“You have none of that here,” he said. “You can grow at your own pace, and what excites me is seeing someone start out with a basic membership but in time, upgrade to a private office or go from a small office to a larger office.

“That means they are growing and accomplishing goals, which is what Brandon designed Huntsville West to do.”

Add to that an overall culture and environment that promotes collaboration, diversity, an exchange of ideas, and that has management that keeps people engaged and inspired to reach for their dreams. They offer free lunches that bring



members of the community together, and provide classes and seminars on a wide variety of business topics like leadership skills; how to create a business plan; how to recognize it is time to get a business license; when to take certain steps, and when not to; even workshops to improve business skills and

find solutions to challenges. One such upcoming program Malone calls Working Women’s Wednesday aims to show working moms how to balance a career, kids, and marriage so they do not have to wait for the kids to leave home before she can pursue her dreams.

“We work to make Huntsville West a casual, friendly environment where you do not have to whisper as if you are in a library, and yet a place where everyone is working towards something big and takes their time here seriously,” said Malone. “We have experienced business people in their 60s and 70s working on starting up a new venture, sitting and sometimes even collaborating with a 19- or 20- year-old who doesn’t have a clue about business, but knows technology like the back their hand. To see that combination come together without a hierarchy of experience that says, ‘I am here and you are there’, is just amazing.”

Kruse, who is a software engineer and all-around techie can be found hoverboarding through the halls of Huntsville West on any given day. He is very creative in addition to his technological and business savvy and has the support from his father and grandfather who are successful Huntsville real estate executives. His mother, Penny Kruse and her company, Interiors by Penel, designed all of the contemporary interior space with its clean techie style and appealing colors.

Because West Huntsville Elementary opened in 1955, bringing its infrastructure up to technological standards that support fast Internet and Voice-over IP (VoIP) would be a problem for some, but when Google Fiber leases office space in your building, that problem is easily solved.

“We have a very creative team who works together to capitalize and get the most out of every inch of space so that it is comfortable, functional, and efficient,” said Malone. “We want Huntsville West to look like it was built as a coworking center that just happened to be used as a school for 50 years, rather than the other way around.” ❄



FRANCHISING

Successful Business Family Brings Hand & Stone Massage to Huntsville

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photography by Steve Babin



Ayesha Patel may be one of Huntsville's youngest new business owners but, at 26, she comes from a long line of successful Huntsville franchise owners who have built multiple restaurant concepts that were new to Huntsville when they opened.

Now the owner of Alabama's first Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa is introducing Huntsville to a new pampering and relaxation concept.

Just opened in the Shops at Merchant Square next door to Chuy's Tex-Mex, Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa offers a membership-based massage and facial experience that is affordable and convenient.

"For \$60 a month, Ayesha and her Stone & Massage staff are going to pay a lot of attention to you for the hour you are there, for not a lot of money," said Bob McQuillan, vice president of franchise development for the chain.



"A massage and facial are luxury items but, with us, not expensive ones. When you think about it, you can't get a plumber to come to your home for less than \$90 an hour, so this is really a great value."

"We were thinking about getting involved in a health and wellness concept and, when I saw this, I thought, everybody loves massages and facials and the two seem to really comple-

ment each other," said Ayesha Patel. "I think Huntsville is ready for an experience like this. We have our membership, which is unique and a great value, but we've also had so many calls already looking to book last minute appointments."

"When you're looking around the area for a massage, you typically have to book a week in advance. At Hand & Stone, you know you can call same-day and we can try to get you in right away."

Ayesha's father, Kumar Patel, started out with Huntsville's first Subway shops but sold them several years ago to pursue other restaurant brands in Huntsville: Five Guys, Nothing But Noodles, and Schlotzsky's Deli, all of which are among Huntsville favorites.

Ayesha's uncle, Dr. Rajesh Patel, is in partnership with Kumar at the Nothing Bundt Cakes in Jones Valley where Ayesha has worked herself up to operating partner, overseeing a staff of 18 employees.

"I've grown up in business, working throughout both middle school and high school in our family businesses," said Patel. "When I graduated from Birmingham Southern, I told myself I wasn't going to pursue the family business, but then I came home and found myself working in the bakery. As an adult, I was allowed a more hands-on experience, and really enjoyed it."

"I did some research and found that Hand & Stone was growing like crazy with over 400 spas across the nation, but none in Alabama. I put in my information and waited to see how it would go."

"Let's put it this way," said McQuillan. "If our company was looking for a football team, Ayesha and the team surrounding her including her father, aunt and uncle who have owned multiple businesses in the franchise world for years, made Ayesha a 5-star prospect for what we want to ac-

complish with our stores in Alabama."

McQuillan said Hand & Stone has tried to set themselves apart in the marketplace and in the industry by offering complementary services across the board.

"Many of the concepts in our industry offer just massages, but we offer facials, hair removal, and two full skin care lines," he said. "It isn't just about the body, it's about skin care, it's about a regimen - a routine - to protect yourself from the sun and honestly, I think we have knocked the cover off the ball when it comes to the aesthetic side of the business."

"That new store in Huntsville is a rocket ship about to really take off!"

"We have a very spa-like atmosphere with 10-rooms, seven masseuses and we're about to hire two more; and four estheticians for facials," said Patel.

"We carry two brands of skin care and anti-aging products. One of them is Dermalogica and the other is Clarity Skin. Dermalogica is more widely

known but Clarity is an all-natural brand out of California. It is a little more expensive, but both are excellent choices.

"Furthermore, those are the only products we use in-house, so if you have a facial, you can follow up by purchasing the same products we used on you."

Hand & Stone memberships cost \$59.95 per month. That includes a 50-minute, hands-on massage or facial. If you don't use it, it carries over to the next month. If you use it more than once a month, you still pay the discounted price of \$59.95 for each additional massage or facial during the month, but you get an additional treatment with each such as a hot stone or Himalayan salt massage, or LED Skin Phototherapy or detox facial, etc., for free.

Membership is month to month so there are no contracts, but without the membership, the standalone price is \$99.95. ♦

DINING

A Food Hall of Kitchens, Breweries and Food Trucks Coming to Town Madison

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photos Courtesy of
Fuqua Development



MADISON — At his State of the City Address in March, Madison Mayor Paul Finley told the audience to buckle up for some big announcements coming out of the new Town Madison development this spring. And, the Breland Companies delivered a big one!

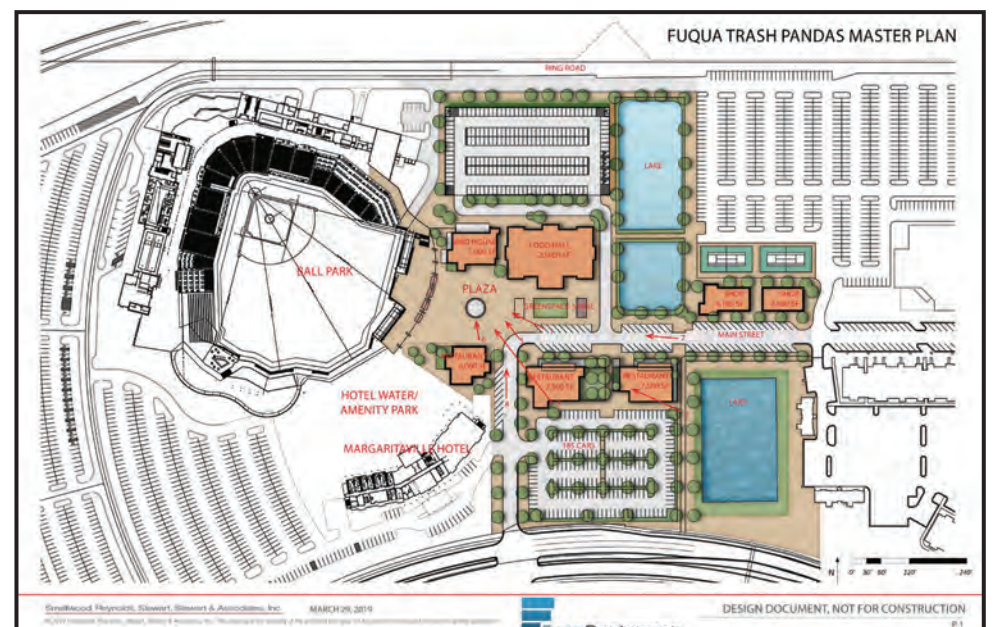
The latest addition is a sprawling Food Hall of 18 kitchens curated by local and regional chefs, two breweries, and several stationary food trucks in an outdoor dining area. A central bar with indoor/outdoor seating will serve as an anchor, and developers are talking to several local and regional

restaurants about joining the unique dining lineup.

Designed by Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart, an international design firm based in Atlanta, the Food Hall will feature a large outdoor event space and covered stage area for a variety of events including a showcase for songwriters, concerts and big screen showings of various sporting events.

“Along with the (Rocket City) Trash Pandas stadium, the Food Hall and plaza area will become the place to be before a game or any time people want to meet with friends and share new experiences.”

The Food Hall joins the growing roster of tenants at Town Madison including the baseball stadium; several hotels including the Avid Hotel, Home2 Suites and Margaritaville



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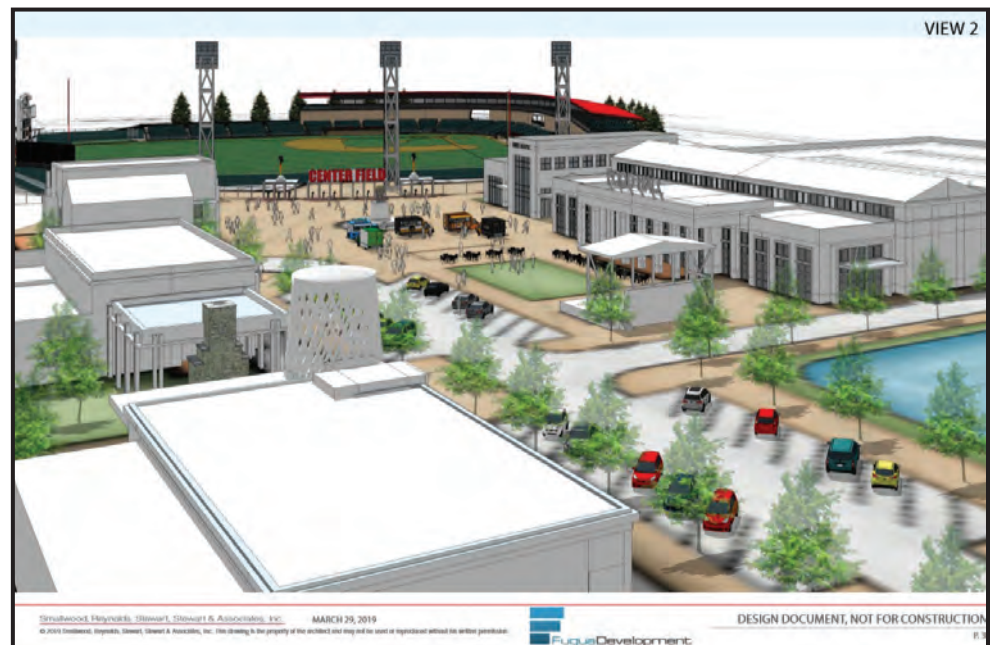
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“Town Madison is taking another step toward our goal to provide a new experience in North Alabama living,” said Louis Breland. “We toured some of the finest food halls in the country looking for the right concept. A great food hall becomes a central gathering spot and brings unique energy to a community.

Resort Hotel; restaurants; national retailers such as Duluth Trading Co.; luxury apartments and residential communities.

Construction on the Food Hall begins this summer and tenants will be announced by the end of the year.

It is slated to open next spring - in time for the first pitch. ♦



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Region Leads State in Capital Investment, Job Creation

By Kimberly Ballard

Limestone and Madison counties topped all other counties in Alabama for new capital investment (CAPEX), according to the 2018 New & Expanding Industry Report just released by the Alabama Department of Commerce. They also led in job creation.

Limestone County led the state with CAPEX of \$1.7 billion, followed by Madison County with \$1.1 billion in new capital investment. The Limestone County figures are heavily driven by the \$1.6 billion Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA plant under construction in Huntsville-Limestone County.

Furthermore, according to the report, Limestone County ranked first in job creation at 4,172 jobs. Madison County ranked No. 3 at 1,043 jobs; however, Harrison Diamond, Business Relations Officer at the City of Huntsville said the report contains a caveat.

“The numbers for our area are even better when you realize that

Huntsville is now comprised of Madison, Limestone and Morgan counties,” said Diamond. “Limestone’s numbers included some investment not in Huntsville, but when you pull it all together, Huntsville’s CAPEX is \$2.7 billion with 5,189 jobs created in 2018.”

Growth in automotive and aerospace remained strong in 2018, boding well for North Alabama, which has momentum for the rest of 2019.

The report outlines 357 economic development projects totaling a record-breaking \$8.7 billion in CAPEX statewide with 17,062 jobs from new and expanding industries. That is the highest increase since 2015 at \$7.1 billion.

“This success solidifies my belief that we are building a more dynamic economy in Alabama and creating a pathway to greater prosperity for its citizens,” said Greg Canfield, secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce. ♦

COMPANY	YEAR	JOBS	INVESTMENT
BAE Systems Inc.	2018	200	\$45,500,000
BWXT	2018	5	\$0
Custom Assembly, Inc.	2018	75	\$0
DC Blox	2018	5	\$10,867,600
Dynetics	2018	130	\$24,455,643
EOS	2018	100	\$2,500,000
Facebook	2018	100	\$750,000,000
Kohler	2018	149	\$175,470,698
LG Electronics	2018	159	\$28,100,000
Mitchell Plastics	2018	95	\$18,315,000
Mynaric USA	2018	2	\$0
Novocol Healthcare	2018	7	\$1,000,000
Radiance Technologies, Inc.	2018	60	\$18,990,000
Redline Steel	2018	50	\$11,111,454
St. Gobain	2018	2	\$13,000,000
Torch Technologies	2018	40	\$6,325,000
Toyota/Mazda JV	2018	4000	\$1,600,000,000
VT Miltope	2018	10	\$0
TOTAL		5,189	\$2,700,000,000



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DEVELOPMENT

Clift Farm: Breland Companies Bought the Farm That Jack Built

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photography by Steve Babin



World War II and took over the family farming business. Jack, who turned 100 years old in December, expanded the farm to more than 600 acres off U.S. 72 between Wall Triana Highway and Balch Road in Madison.

Several years ago, he sold off a sliver to developers who built the shopping plaza where Planet Fitness sits today.

Last fall, Jack officially sold the remaining 550 acres to The Breland Companies which, with his blessing, will develop it into a pedestrian-friendly residential community, park, and retail center.

The Breland development recently broke ground directly across from the Target Shopping Center and Madison Hospital, but according to Joey Ceci, president of The Breland Companies, the development will in every way, honor and represent the Clift legacy.

“Jack has always been a conservationist at heart,” said Ceci. “His original vision for the land was to keep it agricultural, but he realized later in life that it was going to be sold. He wanted

to be an active participant in the process and after much discussion with his family, he entrusted the development

and preservation of his property to Louis Breland.”

“To understand this property, you need to understand the history of the Clift family and what faithful stewards Jack and Lillian Clift have been for this land,” said Breland. “I have ridden every inch of this property with Mr. Clift to understand its history and his vision for this wonderful piece of land.”

The goal is to create a community that will have a timeless feel, that will preserve many of the existing natural attributes, while providing retail, dining, residential, office space, multifamily homes, and medical opportunities.

“There is a lot of retail in that area already, but this one is different from those you are seeing at MidCity Huntsville and Town Madison, which will draw a regional audience,” said

to build roads and a utility infrastructure for the project.

“We have already done a little bit of groundbreaking, but we are currently building arterial roads and putting in that infrastructure,” said Ceci. “Breland is building a third lane into the property from (U.S.) 72 to alleviate the already heavy traffic in that area, and we have brought in traffic engineers to help us install a couple of red lights.”

The front part of the development along U.S. 72 will be retail and restaurants. The back will include three-story luxury apartments and townhomes with an overall pedestrian environment similar to Huntsville’s Village of Providence. Several out-parcels of land may be developed as medical office space, located conveniently across the street from Madison Hospital.

One of the most unique aspects of



Ceci. “This one will be mostly residential and will have a relatively small, town center retail and restaurant component that supports the Clift Farm community.”

He said it will have a very real element of green space: a passive park area planted with wildflowers and fruit trees as opposed to soccer fields; a man-made pond surrounded by greenways, and a lot of walking trails. The residential component will consist of townhomes starting at \$300,000 and homes ranging from \$400,000 to \$600,000.

In March, the Madison County Commission approved \$8 million for Breland to spend on the development,

the project, according to Ceci, is that they carved out a modest plot of land on which Clift’s son and grandson will continue small-scale farming and they are building an enlarged farmer’s market where they will continue to sell fresh fruit and produce from the very land they continue to harvest.

“You have heard restaurants talk about farm-to-table ingredients? In this case, if you order a salad, you can almost sit there and watch the guys go pick it for you,” said Ceci.

Breland expects to begin selling residential lots possibly at the end of this year or early 2020. Some of the retail will likely open in April or May next year. ♦

In 1850, the population of rural Madison was less than 500 residents. Alabama farmers were producing nearly 565,000 bales of cotton and nearly 29 million bushels of corn a year.

John Henry Clift bought a small piece of rural farmland in what was then called Madison Station.

Since then, six generations of the Clift family have farmed that land for cotton, corn, soybeans, fresh fruits, and vegetables, mostly for local consumption.

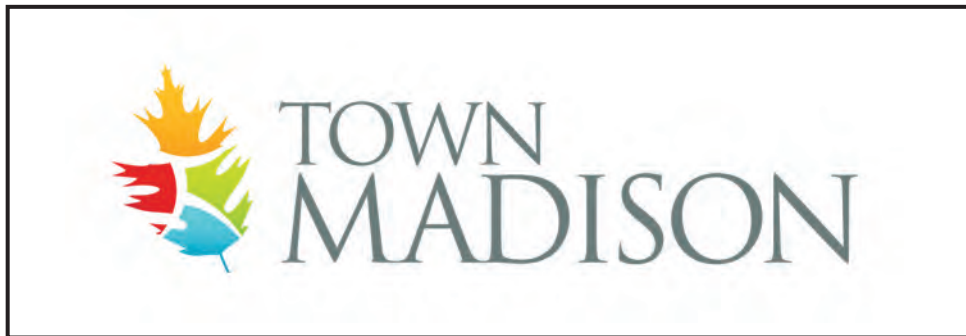
It was Jack Clift, known as Pawpaw to his many children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, who moved home from Atlanta after



TRAVEL / LEISURE / ENTERTAINMENT

First Avid Hotel in Alabama Breaks Ground at Town Madison

by Kimberly Ballard



Shovels in hand, the Breland Companies, Madison County Commission Chairman Dale Strong, and Madison Mayor Paul Finley joined the leadership team for Avid Hotels on Monday to break ground on their first hotel in Alabama.

Located at the western end of Town Madison off I-565 at Wall Triana Highway, the four-story, 87-room midscale Avid Hotel is the first of its kind in the southeast. It is also the newest addition to the 563-acre Town Madison development., which is home to the new Madison baseball stadium and dozens of retail stores, restaurants, residences, and Pro Player Park.

Situated next door to the also new Home2 Suites, Avid offers modern architecture, sound-reducing guest rooms, an outdoor swimming pool and open public areas that allow guests to relax, work, connect or eat.

“Town Madison has always been a regional destination location,” said Louis Breland, founder of Breland Companies who is building the hotel and working to bring more businesses to the multi-use venue. “We are in negotiations with many retailers, many restaurants, and numerous other hotels about coming to Town Madison, so today’s groundbreaking will be the first of many businesses coming this spring

and summer.”

According to an Avid spokesperson, Avid Hotels is owned by Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG) and opened their first location in Oklahoma City in 2017. They have a second Alabama location under construction in Prattville, Alabama. with more than 200 national hotel openings in the pipeline.

“Another hotel here is desperately needed,” said Mayor Finley. “Minor league baseball (Rocket City Trash Pandas) will be here in less than a year, housed in our multi-use venue at Town Madison. The way we fund that multi-use venue is a deal with Ballcorps LLC who owns the Trash Pandas, to rent it from us, but also through lodging tax.

“So this is one more thing that makes a difference in our Master Plan of bringing something of quality to this area that helps the overall Tennessee Valley and makes a major difference in the City of Madison.”

He went on to explain that the 12 baseball fields that make up Pro Player Park, located between the Madison baseball stadium and the new Avid Hotel, is a huge draw for travel baseball.

“What do they need? They need places to stay,” said Finley. “So, they will be right here close by, and the restaurants will follow.” ♦

All That Jazz: Nothing Blue About Rhapsody Jazz Café Opening

By Lori J. Connors



What a way to kick off the start of a business venture ... having a Grammy-nominated artist headline the “pre-grand opening” of your dream.

For Dr. Deidra Willis, owning - and opening - the Rhapsody Jazz Café is a dream come true.

Last month’s “Pre-Grand Opening for the Grand Opening” was held in the ballroom of the Westin Hotel at Bridge Street Town Centre. The headliner was Grammy-nominated saxophonist Boney James.

According to concert-goer Michael Jacobs, “The show was great! The ballroom seats 400. It was full, people were standing; some of them going between the ballroom and the bar.”

James, named in 2009 one of Billboard magazine’s top contemporary jazz artists of the decade, made the stop in Huntsville as part of his “Honestly Tour.”

For Omari Williams, Huntsville native and long-time drummer for James, it was a homecoming stop, as well.

As Huntsville moves toward expanding its cache of large, live music venues, a small, intimate jazz cafe such as the Rhapsody Jazz Café has solid potential of becoming the choice date night destination.

Dr. Willis and her daughter Bria have what it takes to make it all a reality.

For more than 40 years, owning a Jazz club has been a dream in the making for Dr. Willis, a retired educator.

And now, nestled near the Red

Robin, the Rhapsody Jazz Café is a reality.

Why Rhapsody?

The name was selected based on the word’s definition: a highly emotional or ecstatic expression of feeling, Dr. Willis said. For lovers of jazz, the genre does just that: inspires a high level of joy.

Along with featuring some of the finest performers the Jazz world has to offer, the food menu items are equally noteworthy. Combining the elements of soul food with fine dining, entrees include red velvet waffles and chicken, Southern fried fish, and sweet potato pie. Sunday brunch items include shrimp and grits and a broiled grapefruit brulee.

The minority, woman-owned small business plans to give back to the Huntsville community and to serve as an economic engine by promoting musical talent and drawing enthusiastic jazz lovers. One dollar of every ticket sale will go to Huntsville’s District 1 schools to help boost education initiatives.

On a monthly basis, there are plans to host free community dinners for local groups, spotlighting excelling students and small business entrepreneurs.

Upcoming shows include jazz trumpeter Tom Browne (May 17); Canadian electro-jazz ensemble Four80East (June 7) and jazz guitarist Chris Standring (Aug. 2).

For more information, visit <https://therhapsodyjazzcafe.com/contact>. ♦

WORKFORCE

Chamber Announces 2019 Best Places to Work Awards

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photography by Neville Simpson



Attendees at the Best Places to Work Luncheon

The Huntsville-Madison County Chamber of Commerce announced the winners of their annual Best Places to Work® Awards at a luncheon held at the VBC this week. Business-

es of all sizes are represented in five categories ranging from fewer than 25 up to large businesses with over 250 employees. The results are based on employee surveys and were kept

confidential until Tuesday's ceremony. Three places, including gold, silver and bronze in each of the five categories were awarded.

In the Micro Business category of 10 to 24 employees, Cross-flow Technologies, Inc. won the top gold spot; Summit Information Solutions, Inc. won the silver; and the bronze went to New Beginnings Family Law, P.C.

In the Small Business category of 25 to 50 employees, Matt Curtis Real Estate, Inc. won first place followed

by Invariant Corporation and Nesin Therapy Services, P.C. who took the silver and bronze respectively.

Brockwell Technologies, Inc., the National Children's Advocacy Center, and Monte Sano Research Corporation won the gold, silver and bronze awards in the Medium Business category of 51 to 100 employees.

Companies with 101 to 250 employees make up the Large Business category and IERUS Technologies, Inc. won the gold, while Avion Solutions and IronMountain Solutions took the silver and bronze recognitions.

Intuitive Research Technology Corporation, Integration Innovation Inc. (i3), and Modern Technology Solutions, Inc. (MTSI) rounded out the X-large Business category of more than 251 employees. ♦

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RETAIL

Lumberjacks, Flannel Ribbon-Cutting Mark Rainy Opening of Duluth Trading Co.

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photography by
Justina Simon



MADISON — Duluth Trading Co., known for its durable, high-quality apparel and iconic TV commercials, opened its first Alabama store last month, in weather befitting the company's products.

Despite the rain, local dignitaries and excited patrons gathered in front of the store for the cutting of a flannel ribbon, followed by Timberworks traveling Lumberjack Show.

"We had a lot of people ask us whether the rain put a damper on our grand opening, but actually, bad weather fits our brand for practical, functional clothing," said store manager Christopher Sailor. "Our customers will tell you a little rain never slows us down or affects the enthusiasm our customers have for our merchandise.

"In spite of the intermittent drizzle, we had a steady flow of customers throughout the day and we had a lot of people telling us how excited they

Lumberjack, Nick Hastedt, saws through a log



were to have a Duluth Trading Company store here in the Valley."

The Minnesota-based company was founded in 1989 as a catalog and, later, successful Internet-only retailer. They began selectively opening stores in 2016 and today have 54 stores across the U.S.

Though the store at Town Madison is the first in the state, Sailor said Duluth Trading already has a large concentration of customers in the area.

"Customer demand brought us to the Madison area," he said "Madison is an expanding research, technology and high-tech manufacturing center, which fits Duluth's solution-based culture and products.

"We're very excited to bring our unique retail experience, apparel and accessories

to the loyal and hard-working Duluth customers in the area."

Perched on a side street carved out of Graphics Drive and appropriately named Angry Beaver Way, the Duluth Trading Co. store is the first of many retail tenants to open on the old Intergraph campus section of Town Madison.

In addition to the large and enthusiastic customer base Duluth has here, Sailor said the location near the new Rocket City Trash Pandas baseball stadium is part of a broader regional draw for the store.

"Our new neighbors and visitors [across North Alabama and Tennessee] can depend on quality, unique products and a retail experience that puts customer service first," he said. "Duluth is known for its high-quality, solution-based casual wear and workwear for men and women, but in addition to apparel, we also carry travel bags, dog gear, apothecary and more.

"We bring humor to every day universal truths and offer an outstanding customer experience, which really sets us apart." ♦

Lumberjack, Andrew O'Connell, throwing an axe



HEALTHCARE

Huntsville/Decatur-based Home Care Agency Right at Home Expands

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photography by
Right At Home

More than 8.3 million people in the United States were served by long-term home care providers in 2016, according to a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Huntsville-based North Alabama Right at Home is one of those such providers.

With locations in Jones Valley and Decatur, North Alabama Right at Home has been steadily extending its home care services over the past 6½ years to include Madison, Athens, Cullman and Moulton. Now, the company has announced it is expanding into Florence, Muscle Shoals and Russellville.

Joint Commission Accredited

According to Regional Director Richie Thompson, Right at Home is different from other home care services because it has a Joint Commission Accreditation that certifies it nationally as providing safe and effective care of the highest quality and value.

“We instill one quality standard to everything we do and that is summed up in one word: Excellence,” said Thompson. “The Joint Commission Accreditation is not required in the state of Alabama but, as a local franchise, we felt it was important to have it as a reinforcement of that standard for excellence.

“It is a very scrutinizing audit of our staff, our documentation, what we do and how we do it. It was very challenging, but everyone in the medical field is familiar with it and we believe it is worth it.”

Thompson and Right at Home President Bradford Meythaler are also known to reinforce this standard of excellence with surprise personal supervisor visits designed not to question their caregivers, but to ensure the families they serve are getting the absolute best care.

Right at Home not only comes into private homes, but serves in hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living and memory care facilities as well.

Filling a Need Home Health Cannot Provide

A recent assessment showed that the closest family member to the aver-



age person Right at Home serves lives 270 miles away.

Because a home health provider or Hospice can't be there everyday to make sure the patient is following up on their physical therapy, taking their medications properly, or able to perform simple daily tasks, families need help.

“In a majority of cases, our care coordinators cook meals, assist with bathing and hygiene, and transport them to doctor's appointments,” Thompson said. “But we also offer families reinforcement for any medical or therapeutic needs a person may have. We come in on days when medical personnel do not, to work alongside them and follow their lead on medical issues.”

Thompson said the Right at Home care coordinating team consists of people with highly diverse

skills and abilities, but the thing they all have in common is that they love people and have a passion for serving and caring for others.

“Our office manager is a retired guidance counselor while another team member is a retired school principal,” he said. “One of our care coordinators is a retired nurse; and we have one who has a license in physical therapy, so she is qualified to go into a facility or into the home and assist the patient with physical rehabilitation exercises.

“All of them have a passion for service and are taking the opportunity to continue serving and making a difference in their community.”

Thompson said they do not see their care coordinators as employees, but instead, strive to be an extension of the family.

“We are there to love them and

serve them, minister to them, and assist them in a way they feel loved and cared about,” he said.

“Many of our seniors still want to get out and enjoy life. If they're at that place, we take them to entertainment venues, to the mall shopping, and sit down with them to a nice meal out in a restaurant.”

Thinking Outside the Box

“Something we do that is different from other home care services is sponsor events at assisted living and nursing homes,” said Thompson. “We hold senior adult proms and even senior adult beauty pageants. I bring in lights and my sound system and I play DJ.

“We create an environment that is fun and exciting and that brings smiles to the seniors' faces, and their families too.”

Coordinating Services

The Right at Home process begins with an assessment to ensure the person and their family members needs and expectations can be met. Then they place a care coordinator based on those needs, and on personalities, with the intention of giving them the best care possible.

Thompson said their services are not covered by standard health insurance and there is no option right now through Medicare in the state of Alabama, as there are for home health and hospice, but he is hoping that will change.

Right at Home services are paid for in three ways: long-term care insurance; the VA Aid and Attendance benefit, which also covers a veteran's spouse; and private pay.

Right at Home is in the hiring process, putting people through orientation and vigorous training to fulfill the needs of family requests already coming in from those areas.

“The dream is to continue to grow as we continue to have more families to serve, and we will add care coordinators to meet those needs,” Thompson said. “We feel like our services make our communities better and that is our heart and our motto: Serving our community... Right at Home.” ♦



DINING

Full-Bodied Experience Awaits Customers at The Brass Tap

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photography by Steve Babin



Craft beer lovers will have a full-bodied experience on tap when they visit Huntsville's newest brew-themed restaurant.

The Brass Tap, at the Shops at Merchant Square on Bob Wallace Avenue, offers more than 300 beers from around the world, 56 craft beer taps, four Nitro taps, a chef-designed menu, and expert cicerone-certified beer servers.

Half of The Brass Tap flavors will be dedicated to the dozen or so Huntsville/Madison breweries to help promote their customer-favorite brews and to support community awareness about those local brands.

However, The Brass Tap promises more than a variety of hoppy-malty tastes. You will also enjoy a better understanding of why you love the yeasty brew so much!

First, The Brass Tap uses a unique

direct draw keg-to-faucet dispensing process that stores all 60 kegs at a perfect 38-degree temperature, guaranteeing a more consistent, higher quality pour.

"Kurt (Morganweck) and I are craft beer lovers, but we wanted to do something different that would keep it local by promoting local breweries, educate the beer drinker, and provide a high-end, quality experi-

ence for customers," said co-owner Chris Ray. "We wanted to become cicerone-certified beer experts and we wanted our manager and our servers to be Level 1 cicerone-certified servers. That way, with so many different brands available, they can answer questions and make the best recommendations to customers."

A cicerone is the beer equivalent to a wine sommelier – experts in their profession.

guaranteed a fun and tasty education from The Brass Tap who can help you explore different types of beer. You will always receive your beer in the proper glass designed specifically for that type of beer – a pilsner glass, pint, chalice, mug, stein, flute, etc.

The Brass Tap offers seating on two patios with garage doors that can be pulled up or down according to the weather; and a chef-inspired menu that complements the variety of beers offered including salads, tacos, burgers, flatbreads, wings, and steak.

The Brass Tap has a number of events planned for local businesses and workers including Medical Mondays, Taco Tuesdays, Wine Down Thursdays and Teachers Day Out on Friday. On these days, the Brass Tap will offer extended Happy Hour specials for members of the business community as well as residents.

In addition to beer, The Brass Tap has a full spirits bar and wine selection including a Sangria. They partnered with Four Roses Kentucky bourbon for in-house Manhattans and Old Fashions.

"We also have Tap Out Margaritas ... and boy do they go down well with tacos!" said Ray.

The pub also features 14 TV screens and a large accent wall with lighting and a projector so they can air large sporting events, as well as welcome local musical artists, trivia nights and bingo. ♦



"We distinguish ourselves as a high-end beer bar with a unique flair that is different from anyone else in town, but our goal is to become the ultimate craft beer bar in Huntsville," he said.

Whether you are a lifelong Budweiser drinker, a beer aficionado, or a first-time beer-drinker, you are



AAA Ratings Prove Huntsville Is Still Region's Economic Engine

By Kimberly Ballard

For the 11th consecutive year, Huntsville has received the highest possible "AAA" credit ratings from the two major credit rating agencies Standard & Poors and Moody's Investors Services. The agencies cited several factors as the driving force behind the ratings including financial stability, a strong regional tax base, substantial reserve funds, and Huntsville's strong economy as a steady economic engine for all North Alabama.

Out of 22,250 U.S. cities and counties, less than 1 percent receive this top rating.

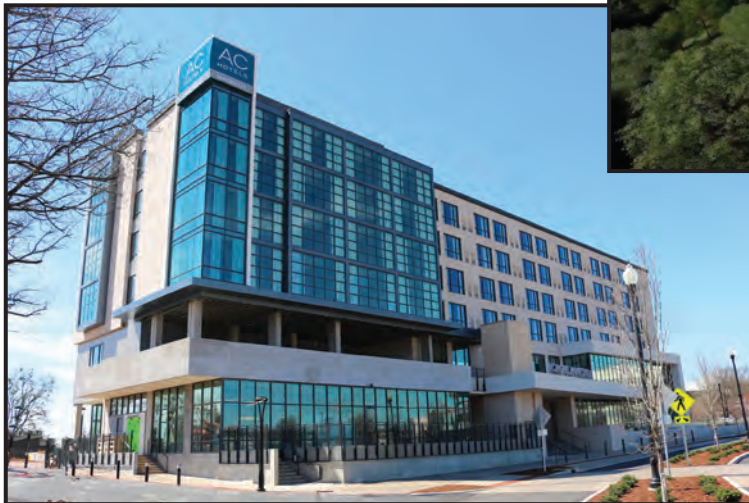
According to S&P, "The city has also been reinvesting in its community

with deliberate and effective urban planning and design efforts. With a combination of pay-as-you-go financing from excess revenues, tax increment revenues and debt proceeds, the city has been able to undertake multiple projects."

"The tremendous growth in Huntsville, our ability to work together strategically, efficiently and collaboratively has made this success possible," said Mayor Tommy Bat-

tle. "We'll use these high credit marks to borrow money at exceptionally low interest rates to fund projects in the city's capital improvement plan."

Budget management and a low debt-to-citizen/debt-to-GDP ratio also



Another \$50 million has been earmarked for capital building and improvement projects at John Hunt, Merrimack, and Brahan Spring parks; for recreation centers; libraries;

greenways; and a public safety training center and police firing range. An additional \$10 million has been put aside for downtown parking garages. ♦

played a large role, according to the report. The ratings give Huntsville a lot of financial leverage including the ability to borrow close to \$85 million for city and countywide projects.

Among them is \$25 million to complete the Greenbrier Parkway in rural Limestone County, which was annexed to Huntsville as part of the infrastructure needed to support the Mazda-Toyota Manufacturing USA megadevelopment.



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BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

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

By Kimberly Ballard

It is a quintessential “Good News, Bad News” story: Huntsville and Madison are growing. However, with growth comes growing pains and every industry must find way to deal with the challenges. For the building industry, a significant shortage of skilled labor is a persistent problem, especially in the area of skilled craft workers like masonry.

“It is a good problem to have but we have a shortage of contractors, electricians, and other construction-related labor in our area because of all the development,” said Mary Beth Broeren, AICP director of Development Services for the City of Madison. “The bad news is that prices have gone up because there is so much work available but getting bids and tapping into the jobs and labor pool is getting harder as there are just not enough laborers out there to do the work.”

Brasfield & Gorrie

According to Trey Clegg, regional president for Brasfield & Gorrie, he is seeing companies across the board invest in new programs and strategies to expand the workforce.

“We are working to address the labor shortage and recruit and train the next generation of workers in the construction industry through a variety of efforts, with an emphasis on apprenticeship programs,” said Clegg.

Some of those programs include industrial carpentry training and basic field engineering, among others.

“One of our key strengths is that we traditionally strive to find work opportunities that allow us to enter the early stages of the construction planning process as a partner,” said Clegg. “This gives us the opportunity to build each project’s unique workforce plan in a strategic and methodical way, ensuring that the workforce is available when it comes time to build.”

Fast training programs for young workers is also helpful.

“We recently implemented a

mentoring/coaching program for our new hires that includes assigning coaches and providing high-visibility blue vests to help more seasoned employees and leaders identify new employees and give them the coaching they need,” said Clegg. “Our ability to effectively acclimate new hires to our safety culture continues to be paramount to our success.”

Hoar Construction

According to Will Watson, vice president of the Alabama Division at Hoar Construction, his company is taking a multi-faceted approach to handling the workforce shortage issue, focusing in four key areas: people, processes, technology, and partners.

“Through technology, we are always researching and testing new tools to help us operate more efficiently and to find ways to fill the skills gap,” Watson said. “In a tight labor market, eliminating wasted labor on a project becomes all the more important for an on-time delivery of the project.”

“One of our most recent examples is the semi-autonomous mason (SAM), a robot that laid 70 percent of the brick on a job in Roanoke, Va.



Photo credit: Shutterstock.com

Roanoke is in (the middle) of the state, and there is limited manpower there. The robot laid 250,000 bricks with a crew of five or six masons”.

The second way is by reaching for workers outside the state.

“We are always working on developing relationships with trusted partners in the areas where we work,” he said. “Oftentimes we are work-

ing on a job in a very busy area, like Nashville, Atlanta, or Charlotte, and to find enough people to work on the job we will reach out to some of our trusted partners in other states or areas of the country to help make a schedule work”.

Hoar Construction also uses lean construction processes, called Smart-Build, to make jobs more efficient.

“Prefabrication of building components is utilized on our projects to shift some of the work load to manufacturing facilities, minimizing the amount of labor needed on the job site to get the project done,” said Watson.

“Learning and development is a focus for Hoar this year. We hired a learning and development manager in the fall, and we are in the process of rolling out our new and improved Hoar University. That program offers training for every employee in our company.”

Finally, Watson said, cultivating talent through learning and development programs is the best fast-track training program they have because it gets college students up to speed on what is happening in the field and in their offices with on-the-job training.

“Training the next generations of skilled workers is always a focus for us, and it makes Hoar a great place to work. Our students rotate through preconstruction, fieldwork, and project management,” he said. “Once they graduate, they

are often offered a job. Currently, we have 63 former co-ops and interns working with us.”

Breland Properties

Joey Ceci, president of Breland Properties, said it is a problem to be addressed by the community overall.

“Like Redstone Arsenal, we draw our workforce from a 13-county region in North Alabama and southern

Tennessee, so what we find is that qualified people who work for us in the construction trades come from as far away as Rogersville or Cullman and they are perfectly willing to go where the work is,” Ceci said. “We also work with schools to teach construction-related skills. The building trades are a way for someone who might not be destined to go to college, to graduate with a skill where on day-one, they have a job that pays very well and is in very high demand.”

He said Calhoun Community College has a lot of skilled worker programs, but he still thinks Breland would benefit from getting into the high schools, too.

“Building is cyclical and every time you get to almost full employment, you have to start looking at hiring and training for more entry level jobs,” said Ceci. “Coming up with ways to do that is something we’ve talked about a lot here at Breland.”

He said one of the things they have floated is a partnership with schools to have the students build a house.

“Companies would donate the material, but at the end of the process, you sell the house and put that money back into doing it again for the next class of students,” Ceci said. “You need partners in the school system and partners from other organizations to do that, but we are happy to spearhead that to make it happen.”

Stepping Up to Meet the Need is what Huntsville and Madison Do!

“The labor shortage really affects small businesses who need tenant improvements or for property owners looking to build, remodel, or renovate,” said Madison’s Mary Beth Broeren. “The shortage slows those projects down, but when we look at those monster-sized Mazda Toyota facilities just getting started, we have confidence that our builders and developers will step up to meet the needs and be successful.” ❁

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

How Good Was 2018? Do the Words 'Off the Charts' and 'Epic' Mean Anything?

By Kimberly Ballard



Photo credit: Jeff White

Someone said that, looking back, 2018 was a year for the record books for Huntsville and Madison County "off the charts" and "epic".

That someone was Chip Cherry, president and CEO of the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce. His remarks came last month at the 83rd Annual Chamber Membership Meeting.

According to real numbers, his proclamation was not overstated.

Huntsville finished 2018 ranked sixth in the nation for job growth according to 24/7 Wall Street. In all, five new companies broke ground, bringing more than 4,200 jobs to Madison County. They made capital investments of \$2.3 billion while 13 current companies made capital investments of just under \$350 million and nearly 1,000 jobs.

The groundbreaking of the \$1.6 billion Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA plant at Greenbrier Road and Old Highway 20 was the biggest

economic story of 2018. The plant is expected to create 4,000 jobs by 2021 when it opens.

Cummings Research Park, the second-largest research park in the nation, is at 91 percent occupancy, marking three groundbreakings and 10 ribbon-cuttings in 2018.

To provide some perspective, the Economic Growth Index, which reflects combined employment, GDP, and wages, shows Huntsville with a 38 percent growth rate in 2018. Compare that to 23 percent nationally and 15 percent growth for the state of Alabama, and Huntsville more than doubles statewide economic growth!

Keynote speaker Chris Voss, author and founder/CEO of the Black Swan Group and a former international kidnapping negotiator for the FBI, used humor and intrigue in speaking to the membership about the art of business negotiation.

Before passing the gavel to 2019 Chamber Board Chair Kim Lewis, outgoing Chair Gary Bolton honored Alicia Ryan of LSINC with the Distinguished Service Award for her volunteer work serving as the vice chair of

the Board of Directors for the Alabama School for Cyber Technology and Engineering, a statewide magnet school created by the Legislature in 2018. She also serves as the chair of the Board of the Foundation supporting the school, which will be the first of its kind in the nation to address the growing demand for cyber and engineering professionals in the workforce.

Huntsville received several significant media recognitions recently. According to The New York Times, Huntsville is one of 52 Places to Go in 2019; Huntsville ranks No. 7 in the Best Places to Live in the U.S. by U.S. News & World Report; and the city is No. 3 on the Wall Street

Journal's Where You Should Move to Make the Most Money list.

Bolton, vice president of Global Marketing at Adtran, presented a \$10,000 donation on behalf of his company to the Alabama School for Cyber Technology and Engineering. ❁



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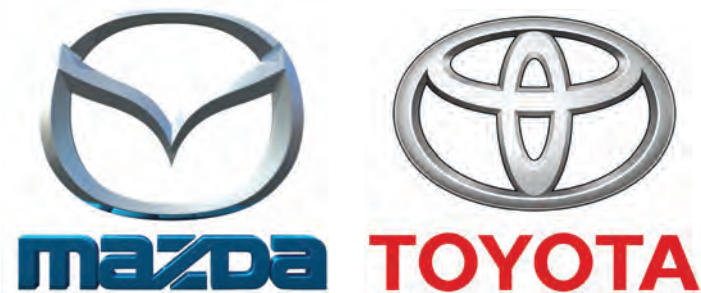
FACILITY

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MANAGEMENT

AMENITIES

SERVICE



Town Madison's \$12 Million Pro Player Park Brings Even More Baseball to North Alabama

By Kimberly Ballard



MADISON – Ever since Madison Mayor Paul Finley announced the building of a new concept at Town Madison called Pro Player Park, it provoked visions of a stylized Ernest Lawrence Thayer: *Then from five thousand throats and more there rose a lusty yell; It rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell; It pounded on the mountain and recoiled upon the flat, For Finley, mighty Finley was advancing to the bat.*

Now we know Finley's statement, which came in January's State of the City Address, will bring a much happier result for North Alabama residents than those of Mudville!

The \$12 million Pro Player Park project is supported solely by private investment and consists of 12 synthetic baseball/softball fields – six championship size and the other six are configured so the fences can be pulled in to accommodate softball. The project also includes batting cages, a pro shop, a small café and vending area, and an indoor soccer field. Statistics show that Pro Player Park should generate about 300,000 visitors a year, which yields about 40,000 room nights per year.

Currently more than halfway through the design phase, the Breland Properties project is situated in Town Madison on the old Intergraph campus. They will break ground in late spring or early summer with expectations for opening about the same time as the Trash Pandas' stadium next spring. The first year will be a soft opening year before shooting for home runs in 2021.

"Pro Player Park was not conceived alongside the

acquisition of the Rocket City Trash Pandas or their new stadium," said Joey Ceci, president of Breland Properties. "However, once that project was underway, one of our associates here at Breland whose son is involved in tournament travel ball, complained that he was always having to drive somewhere else on weekends to watch his son play in these regional tournaments.

"He noted that he was spending his money in all these different locations that did not have any of the attractions and accommodations available in Huntsville. We saw an opportunity to fill that void."

Ceci said Pro Player Park has undergone more than six months of rigorous due diligence, market feasibility studies, and they have had dozens of serious discussions among all the appropriate people including Mark McCarter, convention sales manager at the Huntsville/Madison Convention & Visitors Bureau, and Huntsville Sports Commission Executive Director Ralph Stone. They are both excited about it because it opens up baseball and softball tournament opportunities the city of Huntsville has never had the facilities to support.

Furthermore, they consulted with one of their partners, Tim Dulin who has built similar facilities to Pro Player Park and has contacts with travel ball teams as a coach and a mentor. He is already working with McCarter to start pitching Huntsville for these types of tournaments, and to get on their schedules for when the park opens.

"Both travel baseball and softball are increasing in popularity, but there has always been a hole

in this region for having the facilities to support them," said Ceci. "The traveling tournament teams we are looking at are primarily regional or at least within driving distance, but some of the championship series could bring in people from Puerto Rico and Latin America where baseball is a very popular sport, as well as all over the U.S. at some point.

"Because the fields are synthetic – that is, the dirt and the grass are synthetic – they are more or less plug-and-play and can even be configured to support lacrosse," Ceci said. "These teams can't really afford rainouts so, with synthetic fields, when the rain is over, you don't have a soggy field or muddy infield to worry about because they drain quickly, and therefore play can resume relatively quickly."

Ceci said the closest facilities are in Southaven, Miss.; Memphis and Atlanta.

"Nashville gets some teams, but they don't have a single facility where they play the entire week," said Ceci. "They use a variety of high school fields, some which are not very high quality, and they are spread out all over Nashville. For instance, they may play a game in Gallatin one day, a game in Brentwood the next day, and a third game in downtown Nashville. The logistics are difficult."

He said these teams really come with the intent of playing high-caliber, competitive ball and they like to play in places where there are likely to be major league and college scouts on-hand to see their kids play.

"There is nowhere where the logistics make sense for pro and college scouts who may want to watch a potential catcher play in Smyrna while another player they are interested in is playing across town at the same time in downtown Nashville," he said.

"The way Pro Player Park will be designed, we will be able to situate scout towers adjacent to four fields at a time, so they can watch players on all four fields from a single location."

There are hundreds of travel teams who begin the season in late February/early March and run through October. During school, they play these tournaments mostly on weekends but, when school lets out, they may play for three to five days.

"It's a great generator for us from a business point of view and as a developer, it's another great project," Ceci said. "For several days at a time, you will have visitors spending money shopping at Town Madison or Bridge Street; dining; renting hotel rooms; attending ballgames; and visiting our attractions like the U.S. Space & Rocket Center. That is quite the attractive package." ❁

VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESS

Why Huntsville's Business Environment Embraces Veterans

By Kimberly Ballard

In 1992, Rosalyn Thompson-Blackwell and Roderick Herron met during 14 weeks of Officers Training at Fort Benning, Ga.

Thompson-Blackwell, now president and CEO of Huntsville's Mb Solutions, had worked as a project manager and acquisitions officer in the Army. She was stationed in Colorado Springs and often traveled to Huntsville on temporary duty because her brother was stationed at Redstone Arsenal.

When she retired as a lieutenant colonel from the Army after 24 years of service, Thompson-Blackwell knew she wanted to start a business that supplied services to the Department of Defense.

There was no hesitation about where she would go when the time was right.

Initially, Thompson-Blackwell went to work for People-Tec, a Huntsville DoD contractor which specializes in diversified engineering, modeling and simulation, cybersecurity, rapid prototyping, and program support.

"I knew I needed to learn how to do business with the Army. I had received programmatic and engineering services, and I knew the military structure and the acquisition process," Thompson-Blackwell said. "What I didn't know was the business from the contractor's perspective.

"People-Tec mentored me even though they knew I wanted to go into business for myself. They were excellent at showing me how to cost out contracts and how to manage contracts. They gave me the pieces I needed to solidify it for me. I knew I could go out and do it on my own."

For Herron, a planned short tour turned into a career.

"When I went into the Army, it was only for three years," said Herron, executive vice president of Mb Solutions. "I had my college business degree, but I was deeply in debt, so the Army was the quickest means for paying it off.

"Twenty-six years later, you could say I found my greater purpose."

When he retired, also as a lieutenant colonel, Herron said he made a career decision based on Redstone Arsenal being the closest military installation to his hometown of Grenada, Miss.

"I didn't know much about it, but it had always been a dream of mine to do something in the business spectrum, and I wanted to go into business in Huntsville" Herron said.

Huntsville Known as Pentagon South

"For active duty Army and veterans, Huntsville is known as the Pentagon South," said Rich McAdams, president of Ignite, a certified Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business government contractor headquartered here in Huntsville. "There are 70 federal entities on Redstone Arsenal and so much Army acquisition work is done (there), it is said that if an Army soldier writes it, shoots it, eats it, drinks it, or consumes it in any way, the Army Materiel Command in Huntsville buys it."

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.

"AMC is one of only a half dozen four-star commands in the Army and they buy everything from food, water, clothing and fuel, to helicopters, missiles, bullets, and rifles for the Army," said McAdams. "If the homeland is attacked, the missiles used to shoot them down are here on Redstone Arsenal.

"They have an annual budget of \$147 billion a year, so you can see why Huntsville is so well-known and highly regarded all across the Army, among veterans, and especially those interested in doing business with the government or the military."

The Challenges of Starting a Veteran-owned Business

In 2016, Thompson-Blackwell and Herron opened Mb Solutions.

"It's not as easy as it may seem," said Herron. "It takes a lot of work, a lot of knowledge, the right connections, and you have to count your blessings because sometimes the difference between success and failure is luck!"

There is a service available to help provide the "luck."

"We call it procurement-ready, said Mary Jane Fleming, procurement advisor and VA Certified Verification Advisor at the Small Business Development Center and Procurement Technical Assistance Center. "If you want to do business with the government or team up with large companies or even small companies, we help you understand all the business processes that include making certain you are properly registered as a government contractor, know your legal entity options, help with business plans, ensure you are adequately insured, and that you understand the Department of Labor rules and regulations.



"If a company owner is a vet or services disabled vet, we help get their business verified so they can do business with the VA, Army or NASA. PTAC helps veterans with government-related questions, contract management, how to apply for HUB Zone certifications or the Small Business Administration's 8(a) certification, which is a nine-year business development plan for minority business owners."

Thompson-Blackwell acknowledged there were early struggles but learned from the process.

"We went through a lot of growing pains, but we used it to our advantage," she said. "That whole first year we didn't have any business, and no contracts, but this is where I think a military background is so important.

We used that time to set up operating procedures, write policies, and set up an accounting system.

"Every bit of that time has paid off. We were able to get certifications we would need very quickly and to build the foundations of the company. We didn't waste any of that time."

According to Foster Perry, director of the SBDC, "This is a military town; veterans own a lot of businesses here and they hire a lot of veterans. The military has its own culture, so if they can bring someone in who knows that culture, it is a benefit."

Veterans Bring a Special Skill Set

"I admit up front I am biased when it comes to veterans," said Ignite's McAdams. "I am a vet; my dad is a vet; but I am biased for business reasons. Vets make great employees.

"At a very young age in the Army, you are given a lot of responsibility. At 26 years old, you can have 100 people working for you and be responsible for over \$100 million worth of equipment. When I was 26, I was an M1 platoon leader, number two in command of a tank company, and then maintenance officer for an M1 Battalion in Desert Storm responsible for maintenance and upkeep on 300 or so vehicle armored battalion. I wasn't turning a wrench – I was a manager, but you wouldn't get that kind of responsibility for many years in the private sector."

McAdams said it is the same for a 22-year-old's one-term enlistment.

"You might be a section leader in charge of five or six other soldiers or a squad leader in charge of 10 or 11 other soldiers, and if you are in Afghanistan, you are going door-to-door looking for bad guys and making life or death decisions that affect his soldiers," he said. "He may not have the academic training of a 22-year-old counterpart out of college, but he's got maturity and judgement way beyond that of a college peer."

Herron and Thompson-Blackwell agree.

"I retired out of Space and Missile Defense (SMD) and Rosalyn retired out of the Missile Defense Agency (MDA)," says Herron. "We were both successful military officers and we bring a military work ethic and knowledge base to the table.

"I think once you have done 24 to 26 years of service, it becomes part of who you are. That service spirit is embedded in you, and you still want to be part of it in some way. Providing support to the government is like being a part of something bigger than you."

"We have been on the other side and have a passion for what we do," said Thompson-Blackwell. "We know the needs of the kids – the soldiers who are still out there on the front lines. If I can provide something to make their life easier or that could save one American child's life, it's worthwhile."

Thompson-Blackwell and Herron both say that, upon leaving the military, most veterans don't know their own worth, but they bring a tremendous work ethic.

"Sometimes you have to tell them to go home from work," Herron said with a chuckle. "In the Army, you work until you finish. In the private sector, you have to remind them you can't afford to pay them the extra hours they put in naturally in the military.

"They are used to the suck, the pressures of the job, and a veteran can walk through it because they aren't in Afghanistan getting shot at!"

To, McAdams, that is a key hiring point.

"If I have two candidates, all things equal, but one is a veteran, I will hire the vet in a heartbeat because of their work ethic, their maturity and their judgement." ❁

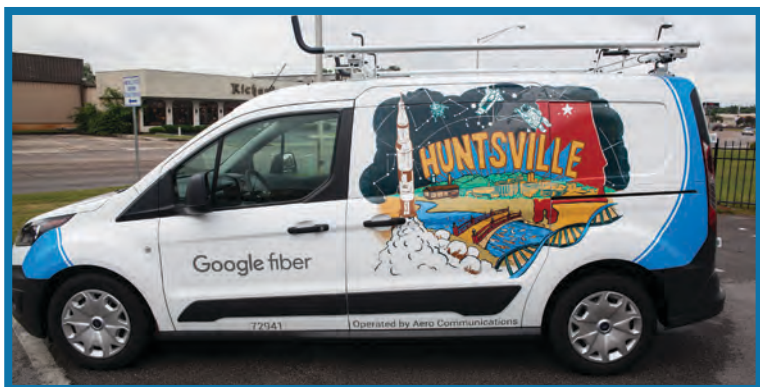
TECHNOLOGY

Midway Through *the* MISSION: Making HUNTSVILLE a GIG CITY

By Kimberly Ballard

Huntsville has never been the kind of place to wait around for technology to make its way here.

Sure, in many ways, Huntsville is still a traditional Southern city with long, hot, sultry summers and a penchant for football rivalries and ice-cold beer.



But make no mistake – Huntsville’s pluck and grit is writ in rocket flames. Never mistake a slow way of talking for short-sighted vision.

That was made clear back in 2012 when Google Fiber sent out its initial call to cities across the nation, interested in partnering with the technology giant to build a high-tech fiber network worthy of bringing gigabit internet service and Voice-over IP telephone services to the Tennessee Valley.

When all the entrants, including Huntsville, were thrown into the hat and a select few cities were chosen, Huntsville wasn’t among them.

Oh well.

If in 1956, the Redstone Testing Center had given up the first time a missile disintegrated on a test stand, Malawi may have put men into space before Huntsville!

According to Lauren Johannesmeyer, city manager for Google Fiber, Huntsville city leaders know something about executing a mission and Harrison Diamond, then the director of project management at the Huntsville/Madison Chamber of Commerce, was on a mission.

“I remember back as early as 2013, Harrison (now the business relations officer for the City of Huntsville), had a vision for what a gig city looks like,” said Johannesmeyer. “Between the Chamber of Commerce, Huntsville, and Huntsville Utilities, they basically said, ‘We’re going to

build the network anyway.’

“Once that was established, Google Fiber came back and said, ‘If you are going to build it anyway, can we lease it from you?’”

That initiative makes Huntsville a one-of-a-kind model for Google Fiber, the only city in the country where a utility company is constructing the network rather than Google Fiber.

“Huntsville may be the first, but we won’t be the last to make this investment,” said Joe Gerhdes, director of

communications and public relations for Huntsville Utilities. “Huntsville has drawn the interest of utility companies in many cities across the country who are looking at doing the same. They are watching to see how successful we are.”

Rings & Huts

Huntsville Utilities is just short of midway through the build and right on schedule.

Construction consists of a fiber ring that encircles Huntsville to make it easy to branch service off into neighborhoods. The ring is divided into six fiber huts off which Huntsville Utilities connects the local Google Fiber network into the Internet backbone and the worldwide web.

“Huntsville Utilities manages and maintains the core ring that wraps around the City, and Google Fiber owns and manages the network from the point of access at the street, up to the customer’s house or business,” Johannesmeyer said. “Right now, in terms of serviceable areas for us, there is what I call a pizza slice-shaped section in north Huntsville. It was our very first opening on May 23, 2017.

“We also have all of Big Cove and Hampton Cove from Dug Hill Road to Cecil Ashburn Drive, and we are opening areas in south Huntsville near Mountain Gap and Challenger schools.”

Gerhdes added, “We started with

the Chase Hut north of Winchester Road to Pulaski Pike because the Chase area power distribution center in northeast Huntsville was a great place to start.

“Big Cove and Hampton Cove are finished, and we are currently working on the Farley Hut in south Huntsville.”

He said the Triana Hut will service most of the core of downtown Huntsville including Blossomwood, and the utility is readying the 911 Hut near the Madison County 911 Center and Wynn Drive. The final construct will be the Jetport Hut at the western edge of Huntsville. The entire fiber network project is scheduled for completion in 2020.

Everyone Benefits From Improved Infrastructure

“This undertaking has been great for Huntsville, but it has also been great for telecoms and cable providers, too, because it has significantly improved the infrastructure under which all of these providers offer services,” Gerhdes said. “They too can now offer a better, more affordable service to their customers.”

Construction is always subject to change with many variables impacting schedules, but Google Fiber’s current contract with Huntsville Utilities is to service addresses they turn over to them as the ring expands within the Huntsville city limits. The lease agreement is not exclusive so other companies can lease out fiber on that ring as well.

In terms of what Google Fiber has to offer customers, its services include 100 MB or 1,000 MB (gigabit) fast residential internet options; traditional television services with 220+ channels that can be combined with their internet offering and Wi-Fi extenders; and a Voice-over IP (VoIP) phone service solution that uses the internet rather than traditional hard-

wired landlines.

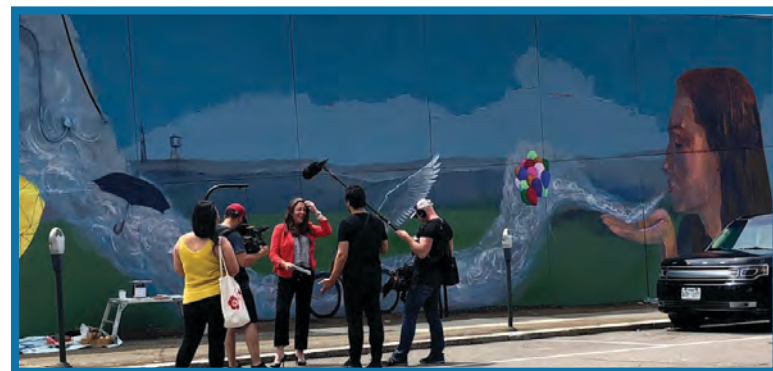
Currently service to multifamily units (apartment complexes and condominiums) is minimal but, ideally, Google Fiber wants to service as many people as possible so, as the ring grows, so will Google Fiber access.

“We also offer small and medium-size business gig packages with really cool extras businesses need to be successful,” said Johannesmeyer.

Community Involvement Vital

She said community involvement is vital to promoting digital inclusion initiatives and education that provide groups and individuals with access to information and communication technologies. Google Fiber’s Community Impact Team works with local nonprofits to promote digital inclusion throughout the Tennessee Valley.

One of those enterprises is the Digital Inclusion Fund, created at the Community Foundation with sponsorship funding from Google Fiber to make Internet access and digital education available to residents currently without access to those resources. More than \$100,000 in grant money was given to high-impact programs in North Alabama this past year.



“Ours is a very innovative model and we applaud Huntsville Utilities for their leadership,” said Johannesmeyer.

While the mission to make Huntsville a Gig City cannot yet be stamped “accomplished” - it is certainly in full rattle-battle!

To find out if Google Fiber is available in your neighborhood or business location, visit <https://fiber.google.com/cities/huntsville/>. You may also submit your email address to be notified when it is available. 🌸

SMALL BUSINESS

Record-Setting Night *for* Madison Chamber Best in Business Awards

By Kimberly Ballard



It was a record-setting night for the annual Madison Chamber of Commerce Best in Business Awards.

This year's event was held at the Insanity Complex Entertainment Center and, according to Pam Honeycutt, executive director of the Chamber, it was the biggest awards program ever.

"We had more than 400 attendees and a record number of nominees this year, giving the judges a real challenge to select the winners," she said. "The Best in Business Awards are a celebration of the amazing contributions our local businesses are making to grow and strengthen our community."

More than 50 local businesses were nominated in eight categories. The winners were II XCL Strength & Conditioning for Health & Wellness; Lee Company for Home & Living; Nesin Therapy Services for Medical Practice; and Blue Pants Brewery for Food Service. Alexander's Martial Arts (Health & Wellness); Insanity Complex (Home & Living); Compass Physical Therapy (Medical Practice); and Lawlers Barbecue (Food Service) were finalists.

Deborah Ward of Inside-Out Ministries won the Community Servant of the Year and Sarah Sledge of Madison Public Library was the finalist. HomeFit Consulting won Start-up Business of the Year, with Legacy Chapel Funeral Home and Crematory as the finalist.

Louis Breland of Breland Companies won Excellence in Leadership & Service with Rachel Brown of Rachel Brown Homes the finalist.

Hogan Family YMCA won Nonprofit of the Year; Compass Physical Therapy took Small Business of the Year, and The Riley Center won Best Business of the Year. Finalists in those respective categories were the Downtown Rescue Mission, Inside-Out Ministries, and Kids to Love.

Teresa Croley of iHeartMedia won Ambassador of the Year.

Known for being inspirational and uplifting, the featured speaker was Dr. Karockas Watkins, CEO/President/Executive Director of Ability Plus. Good Samaritan Hospice was the event's presenting sponsor and Capital Management Services was the trophy sponsor.

The evening started with a cocktail party sponsored by Progress Bank, and the winners and their guests were treated to a VIP champagne reception sponsored by IberiaBank after the program. ❁

Business Matchmaker: Speed-Dating *for* Government Contractors

By Kimberly Ballard

They've got the time and money and could be a match made in ... well, Huntsville.

It was the 10th annual Business Matchmaker where companies, business entities and government agencies swapped information to help each other be successful.

The Small Business Development Center and Procurement Technical Assistance Center at the University of Alabama in Huntsville hosted the event last month at the Jackson Center in Cummings Research Park.

Small businesses statewide were able to connect with purchasing and procurement representatives from large enterprise companies like Raytheon and Lockheed Martin; government agencies such as the Missile Defense Agency and NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center; as well as state and local entities such as Huntsville Utilities and the City of Huntsville.

Mary Jane Fleming, procurement advisor at the SBDC/PTAC, said Business Matchmaker is a rare networking opportunity in which small Alabama companies have a one-on-one sit-down with the people who make the purchasing decisions.

"We laughingly call it speed dating, but it is really controlled networking," said Fleming. "We help companies do their homework because getting government contracts is a lot like applying for a job. You really need to understand what the company buys, how they buy it, and who they are currently buying it from, before you meet with them."

More than 100 Alabama companies and about 60 large business entities participated this year. Each of the potential contractors prepared 12-minute presentations on how they can meet the needs of agencies and prime contractors by providing detailed information concerning their capabilities, technology, and services.

The SBDC/PTAC then matched up five or six companies with a prime contractor or larger entity and scheduled a 'gatekeeper' meeting between those who were the best fit for helping those companies meet their goals.

"In spite of how it may appear, growing a small government contracting business is not easy to do," said Fleming. "It is competitive, and you really have to understand business development and how to build relationships. If no one knows who you are, it's not going to be easy, so companies must get out and network and attend every event they can."

"Business Matchmaker is one of the most important networking events we have every year and it has been very successful for contractors and large businesses alike." ❁



SIT DOWN WITH SUCCESS

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

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photos Steve Babin

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. His downhome Alabama drawl has made him a celebrity poet among North Alabama radio listeners. Successful HVAC business owner, cattle farmer, and deer hunter, it is amazing to realize he almost became a spy for the U.S. Air Force.

The heating and air conditioning business was not your first career choice?

No. When I got out of the Air Force in 1992, I was going to continue my work in communications with the National Security Agency, but Clinton had just gotten elected and there was a four- to eight-year hiring freeze in that department. There was no place at the time for a spy like me.

I grew up on a dairy farm, so I was a hard labor guy. A buddy offered me a position working for his HVAC. I didn't know a boot from a thermostat, but I believe in getting things done. I said to myself, you gotta have a career and this looks like a good one. I discovered within a week, if you fix it the way the factory designed it, you don't have to go back, so I took a lot of pride in my work.

What was it like going out on your own?

I took out a \$50,000 home equity line to start this business and GMAC let me borrow 2 trucks!

You have to have your NATE state board certification to own a HVAC business. I am licensed statewide in Alabama and I currently have permits to work in Athens, Madison, and Huntsville. It is a fairly regulated industry.

What is the hardest part of your business that also makes you successful?

You gotta be willing to change,

willing to roll with it, but the main thing is, you have to get up and go to work, and it is hard work.

Flipping houses is big these days and some of these houses were built in the 1950s and don't have central heat and air so they ask us to install it.

HVAC is a trade where you must be a jack-of-all trades and pretty good at all of them.

What advice do you have for people thinking about starting or getting into the HVAC business? Do they need to go to college or a trade school?

I took a lot of classes, but I never paid anybody to teach me how to do this work. All mine was OJT. School can't hurt but to be successful in this business, you can't be afraid to get up and go to work - and its hard work.

Now technology companies are selling home security and automation systems that allow you to control your thermostat no matter where you are. Isn't that a big change?

I have been in the business over 30 years and I have seen tremendous changes.

We've been fixing the original R-22 refrigerant systems for residential, also known as HCFC hydrochlorofluorocarbon systems since before I was born. Now they have outlawed those systems and they use R410A because of government and EPA regulations. There are lots of refrigerant and efficiency changes happening now.

In the 1990s, they started using electronic circuit boards and digital meters. So, in addition to all the other trades, you had to become an electronics guy. Nobody likes to change, but okay - we got it, we're learning.

Then by the 2000s with the Internet and smartphones, they introduced digital and program-

mable thermostats, so now you also have to be a computer guy and a network guy.

Today they are making systems that are inverter-driven and they are a whole lot more efficient, but it is a constantly changing environment and it is becoming harder to find people that can do or are willing to do it all.

It's gellin', but it's a slow gellin' process. ♦



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GOVERNMENT

Huntsville Unveils “Smart Growth Strategy” for Sustainable Growth

By Kimberly Ballard

A city leadership panel of Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle, Huntsville City Administrator John Hamilton, Director of Urban and Economic Development Shane Davis and City Engineer Kathy Martin took an in-depth look into the vigorous activity and relentless growth Battle talked about in his State of the City Address.

Huntsville’s smart growth strategy seems to underlie every aspect of the city’s regional approach to economic growth. Infrastructure, high quality of life, good jobs, and its strategic placement at all points of the city are significant components of that strategy.

Moderator Chip Cherry, Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce president, asked Battle about the role regional cooperation plays in the success of the local economy, and in advocating for Redstone Arsenal.

“Teamwork, but not your typical community teamwork. Cross jurisdictional teamwork and collaboration,” Battle said. “None of us are an island. We work together.”

“Mazda Toyota came about because Huntsville was working with Limestone County and the City of Athens on utilities, and that had us working with the state Department of Transportation and the state Department of Commerce.”

“We have a lot of servant leaders in our communities who learned how to put aside egos and work together to make good things happen without worry about who is getting the credit or the fame for it.”

He cited the leadership of the Chamber of Commerce, Huntsville Utilities, Huntsville Hospital and Crestwood Medical Center.

“We have great leadership across the board at upper levels, but that can’t sustain us,” Battle said. “You have to have leadership on the director’s level, and we have been developing leadership at that level for the past 15 years. Leadership is executing a plan.”

Infrastructure

“Restore Roads was a vision back in 2014 to help sustain the growth



Leadership panel: Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle, Huntsville City Administrator John Hamilton, Director of Urban and Economic Development Shane Davis and City Engineer Kathy Martin

we knew was coming,” Martin said. “Three of those projects are complete. Cecil Ashburn is the latest, and the Land Trust just opened their parking lot there - and by the way, the sunsets off Cecil Ashburn are quite amazing.”

“The Sandra Moon Complex is a great example of what will be a little town center in southeast Huntsville providing arts, a library for academic pursuits and reading, but also athletic events right there on that same location, so it becomes a hub, almost a little village down there,”

She said Research Park Boulevard, Mastin Lake Road, and the northern bypass are all under construction or starting construction. Greenbriar Parkway adds seven miles of new infrastructure to connect to I-565; and the reconstruction of old Highway 20 adds another five miles to the Mazda Toyota corridor.

Good weather has permitted a lot of progress on Martin Road just outside the arsenal’s Gate 7. Martin said now that the traffic has shifted lanes, the progress will be more noticeable as the City wants it completed by next fall.

Haysland Road on the south end

of town is on schedule to open the end of this year, with the Edinburgh connector starting next spring.

“The south connector, previously called the Southern Bypass project, has been around for quite a while,” said Martin. “Currently, it is called the Arsenal East Connector and has been revived to get a direct interstate connection down to the Patton Road gate as quickly as possible. There’s been some federal funding that’s allowed Huntsville to do a corridor study and get the first phase of that East Arsenal Connector in the beginning design process.”

She said the city is working closely with the federal government, the state, and Redstone Arsenal to come up with an alignment that works for everyone.

“Currently, our staff is managing approximately 70 roadway projects,” Martin said. “That is about 300 lane miles of improvements in our city, equating to about \$800 million in federal, state, and local funding infrastructure to accommodate the growth we see.”

Quality of Life

“When we talk about infrastructure, we think roads, sidewalks, utility expansion, and resiliency,” Hamilton said. “Those things are all extremely important, but there are other pieces of public infrastructure necessary to be part of workforce development.

“Companies work hard to make their businesses places where people want to work. The City has to make

Huntsville a place where people want to live.”

John Hunt Park is part of Huntsville’s Central Park, which is laid out as a complex of parks at Huntsville’s heart. Building a wide diversity of recreational and athletic opportunities around it is a large part of improving Huntsville’s quality of life.

Quality of life to city leaders is hosting college-level sand volleyball tournaments such as the Junior National Championships this year, in a complex built so that the college tournaments are using the same facilities as the youths.

Hamilton said the same thing is happening in soccer, lacrosse, and cross-country infrastructure where the former municipal golf course was converted into a cross-country course.

“Local high schools hosted a cross-country meet that attracted teams from all over the state,” said Hamilton. “Next year we’re hosting one of the NCAA regionals on the same course. It reflects our strategy of making sure we’re meeting and identifying the daily demands of our community and for all their family’s recreational pursuits, but doing it in a way that really can attract business into our community and bring sports tourism in.”

But Huntsville isn’t just investing in big venues. The city is making investments in every neighborhood as well.

“The Sandra Moon Complex is a great example of what will be a little town center in southeast Huntsville providing arts, a library for academic pursuits and reading, but also athletic events right there on that same location, so it becomes a hub, almost a little village down there,” said Hamilton. “Same thing across the mountain at the Mark Russell Recreation Center north of the Johnson Legacy Center with rock climbing and fitness facilities and nature preserve.

“We disperse it geographically across the city and ... really expand the diversity of those opportunities. We all love football, baseball, basketball, and continue investing in that;

GOVERNMENT

we also have a rapidly growing lacrosse community and running and biking communities.”

He said by introducing sports such as skateboarding into Huntsville, it helps attract people from different parts of the country.

“We are investing in a way that’s high quality and meets the rolling demand,” he said.

Other quality of life projects include the Benton H. Wilcoxon Municipal Ice Complex. Hamilton said many people who move to Huntsville from up north are surprised at how robust the hockey, figure skating and curling community is here, and has been for decades. As a result, the aging Ice Complex got an \$11 million renovation that will be finished in the middle of November with higher quality ice, better seating, and more amenities.

Davis joined the conversation to discuss the many revitalization projects and new investments projects ranging from multihousing to commercial space and retail development.

“Joe Davis Stadium was designed to be a baseball stadium and, in its current configuration, that is all it can be, but we have the ability to transform it into a venue for high school football, soccer, lacrosse, and basically any sport that uses a rectangular field,” said Davis. “We will leverage the value that park brings in in hotels, restaurants, and whatever makes sense from a commercial perspective.”

There will be additional infrastructure through the middle of Brahan Spring Park to connect it to Lowe Mill as an arts center, and on into the downtown area. That project starts in 2021.

“We want to make sure our existing companies are expanding and staying focused on reinvestment in downtown, Research Park, workforce development, and making sure our communities are prepared for the opportunities we see coming.”

The Johnson Legacy Center project is in its first phase as part of the quality of life infrastructure. Davis said when the public safety training facility relocates to the former Johnson High School site, there’s a lot of potential for large green spaces that will allow for festivals and events.

“And we continue to see a lot of desire for investment in the downtown area, so parking infrastructure will ultimately help drive the expansion of the Von Braun Center. Those improvements will provide more arts and entertainment to the area.”

There is always more to come, so they work in phases he said but for the next couple of years, they are focused on making sure Huntsville’s new corporate citizens are successful.

“We want to make sure our existing companies are expanding and staying focused on reinvestment in downtown, Research Park, workforce development, and making sure our communities are prepared for the opportunities we see coming.”

Strategic Placement

“Our ability to execute the plan is what we’re seeing today ... being very deliberate in the placement of jobs, and it’s not just chasing the western corridor, putting companies in the right locations for them to be successful, but also brings leverage into our communities,” said Davis.

“I think you have to go back 10 to 12 years ago during what people call the Great Recession or a decade in the rearview mirror,” Davis said. “You’re trying to meet budget and provide community services. We sat down and came up with a vision, a plan; but your plan is only as good as its execution.

What we see throughout Huntsville, he said, is the placement of those jobs and major investments in areas where neighborhoods can come back and revitalize. Existing neighborhoods and commercial corridors usher in new neighborhoods, creating a new commercial lane that is not in any one part or section of the community but abroad. No part of the city is left out of the growth strategy.

“We looked at about 67 non-industrial projects that are active in the middle of COVID-19,” said Davis. “Huntsville is not only punching

above their weight class as a secondary tier metro competing with major metros across the USA, but that is no

“It’s a community that wins every competition it enters, and I think that just permeates who we are as a community and drives that success.”

longer the challenge. Huntsville has become a totally different market, and that’s good not only for the bottom line to provide more services and quality of life attributes to our communities, but to be able to pay for them, is good for our community, our citizens and our businesses.”

He said bringing more people into a community is the best way to help small business. “It is the placement of industrial growth at Research Park and in and around the Arsenal, but also placing it in the northeast and southeast part of town, and you can see the impact caused by it in the community,” Davis said.

The Secret to Huntsville’s Success

Cherry said Huntsville is the most optimistic community he has ever been around and that no one should be surprised leadership has executed the plan so well.

“This is a community that not that long ago said, ‘Sure, we can put

a man on the moon and bring him home alive, no problem,” said Cherry. “It took a whole lot of local teamwork to do it, but when you’re in a place that is now saying, ‘No problem. We will go to Mars and we will make sure they stay alive and come back alive’. That’s a community that doesn’t see obstacles. It’s a community that wins every competition it enters, and I think that just permeates who we are as a community and drives that success.”

Battle said while people talk about Huntsville being number one, number one isn’t important - being the best, is.

“Many years ago we were updating our strategy, talking about where the voids were and whether things had to be able to realize our full potential, because Toyota at the time was advertising for 200 jobs and they had 10,000 people apply,” he said. “It showed us we had an under-employment issue.

“This led community leadership to focus on diversification and picking up more advanced manufacturing jobs. It was really kind of pulling people up from the bottom and a lot of people were questioning it, but we designed a mechanism to make sure investment is protected. Every one of the projects we’ve done, we look very closely at return on investment, at how much we’re going to invest, what the returns will be, how many jobs we are getting, and what is it going to do to our economy? What is the capital

(Continued next page)



GOVERNMENT

expenditure going to be coming back into it?”

Redstone Gateway is an example.

“We were going to invest a certain amount into infrastructure, but we wanted to make sure we would get paid back. So, we worked in a unique fashion, different than anybody had ever done before,” said Battle. “The company actually borrowed the money to come in, and they were paid back by the buildings they built and the property tax as it came back to them.

“As a city, we did not have exposure. There was no risk as long as they built the building. We felt very comfortable that the value of that building would continue to make money and continue to bring in property taxes that could pay off that infrastructure.”

He said the city always expects Huntsville to get a return on the investment with every project and that the citizens and people engaged in the community should know the

appointment of resources is very strategic, designed to yield secondary impacts throughout the market like parking decks that allow for denser developments.

“I think we can look at every section of the city, every part of town and it is growing right now,” said Battle. “In Hampton Cove we’ve got a new community center and the Sandra Moon Complex and Hays Farm project are going to be magnificent developments,” said Battle.

“And don’t forget out to the west and all the property surrounding the Mazda Toyota plant and Polaris. It is going to have growth factors, as well



as Research Park and the Arsenal. Research Park still has over 300 acres of undeveloped land and it is growing very fast.

“We still have about 2.5 million to 3 million square feet of land to be developed at Redstone Gateway, and

on the Arsenal, the growth we are seeing out of the FBI and from internal or organic growth coming out of all the other agencies, makes it a great time to be in Huntsville.”

Can we get an ‘Amen?’ ♦

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EMERGENCY

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SMALL BUSINESS

A Virtual Celebration Honors Madison Chamber of Commerce's Best in Business

By Kimberly Ballard

MADISON – Virtuous Realty Group was the “virtual” winner for the Madison Start-Up Business of the Year in the annual Madison Chamber of Commerce 2020 Best in Business Awards.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the winners were announced virtually in 13 categories. However, a dinner was held for the winners at Tom Brown’s restaurant. Chamber of Commerce officers joined the winners in the masked, socially distanced event.

Conditioned Air Solutions was named Best Business of the Year and U-Lock-It Storage won



the Small Business of the Year category.

Cathy Miller from United Way won Community Servant of the Year; Alice Lessmann from Signalink received the Excellence in Leadership & Service Award and Carlos Mendoza of Edward Jones was the Ambassador of the Year Award winner.

Among the Small Business Awards, Anglin Reichmann

Armstrong was recognized as Professional Service Business of the Year and Madison Visionary Partners won Best Non-Profit of the Year.

Fit4Mom-Madison was named Health & Wellness Business of the Year; Hawthorne at the Ridge was the Essential Services Business of the Year; and Insanity Complex won Culinary Business of the Year.



Huntsville Ballet danced off with the Arts, Entertainment & Hospitality Business of the Year; and Thrive Alabama won Medical Practice of the Year. ♦

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HOUSING

Construction on Cottages at Old Monrovia on Schedule for Spring Opening

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photos Courtesy of
Capstone Communities

Huntsville's high-level of occupancy and growth is offering encouragement to Capstone Communities.

That's because the company's unique 25-acre housing development off Old Monrovia Road, about a mile from Huntsville's booming MidCity District, is on schedule.

"We are very excited to be in the Huntsville market, it has impressed us even with COVID," said John Acken, executive vice president of Development for Capstone Communities. "We feel we are bringing a unique and dynamic housing development type to the Huntsville market."



"We feel we are bringing a unique and dynamic housing development type to the Huntsville market."

Some of the key features he said could be the difference when compared to other types of housing are the units are single-story attached and detached homes. There is also a mixture of lofts and townhomes that give off, what Ackens calls, a sense of place and ownership, especially since every unit will have its own backyard.

"To drive through the community, one gets the sense of driving through a true neighborhood" he said. "The streets are walkable and pedestrian-friendly, and it has tree-lined streets that create a real feel of community."

There will also be "pocket parks" and a central clubhouse with a pool.

Just minutes from the University of Alabama-Huntsville, the property was designed to appeal to families attracted to the area due to

its job growth, and to people who may wish to rent for a year while they build or find a home to buy.

Acken said the homes are also perfect for millennials starting their first job and seniors looking to downsize.

"We want to encourage walkability, encourage a great pattern of streets that are connected through a neighborhood with individual pocket parks where people can come together and enjoy a sense of community"

"We want to encourage walkability, encourage a great pattern of streets that are connected through a neighborhood with individual pocket parks where people can come together and enjoy a sense of community," said Acken. "We also have a central house, and it will be

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HOUSING

“That’s really what we are trying to accomplish more than anything else. Areas where people can come together and create that sense of community.”

a neat gathering area for people to come together.

“That’s really what we are trying to accomplish more than anything else. Areas where people can come together and create that sense of community.”

Shep Nolan, president of CBI Construction, said construction remains on schedule, despite COVID-19. The company broke ground in late April during the early days of the pandemic.

“We all felt the impact of COVID in different ways,” said Nolan.

“But our team was fortunate to be able to continue moving forward as initially planned, while ensuring the health and safety of our team members and trade partners.”

CBI laid foundations in August for the main buildings and began framing the clubhouse and pool area in September.

“Our biggest impact has been our ability to stay ahead of the supply chain,” said Nolan. “Our supply partners have been very forthcoming about their limitations, but we have been able to order in advance and stay ahead of it.”

The Cottages at Old Monrovia plans to be available to lease first quarter 2021 and available for occupancy by March. They hold a ribbon-cutting event sometime around March, about the same time they will announce the start of a second phase of the housing project.

Designed by Nequette Archi-



ecture & Design, The Cottages at Old Monrovia will offer a variety of amenities such as nine- to 12-foot ceilings, granite countertops, wood-grain flooring, in-unit washers and dryers, a smart home technology package, fitness center, resort-style pool, centralized clubhouse, dog park, electric car charging stations, a car care center, a pet spa, 24/7 on-call maintenance

and optional enclosed garage parking.

Capstone Communities (formerly Capstone Collegiate Communities) is a Birmingham-based commercial real estate firm specializing in the development, management and construction of student, multifamily and senior housing. ♦

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DEFENSE

SIERRA NEVADA EXPANDING Huntsville Footprint

By Kimberly Ballard

Sierra Nevada has broken ground for a 60,794 square-foot aircraft modifications complex at Huntsville International Airport.

It is the company's second location in Madison County after opening a hangar facility at the Madison County Executive Airport last February.

The facility is expected to be fully operational in early 2019. Sierra Nevada employs nearly 400 people statewide and supports numerous subcontractors in Alabama.

Planned in preparation for future fixed- and rotary-wing program support, including STRATA-G and Sierra Nevada's bid for the Army's Logistics Support Facility Management Activity contract, it is all part of SNC's long-standing foothold in Huntsville's aerospace and defense industry, according to Tim Owings, executive vice president for the company's Integrated Mission Systems division.

"LSFMA is only one of the possibilities," Owings said. "We are working on several other things both domestically and internationally that

will affect operations in Huntsville and warrant the new facility.

"We are in the process of bidding several large programs that we think we have exceptional solutions for and, should those come in, we will need the expanded space."

The modifications facility will offer key services such as innovative aircraft systems design, modification, upgrade and logistics support to military customers. It will also boast the added ability for on-site certification, inspection and certified maintenance.

Sierra Nevada held an open house in June to exhibit its work in the helicopter market, which Owings said is a big piece of the company's business in Huntsville. However, the company also builds traditional fixed wing aircraft for surveillance missions for U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

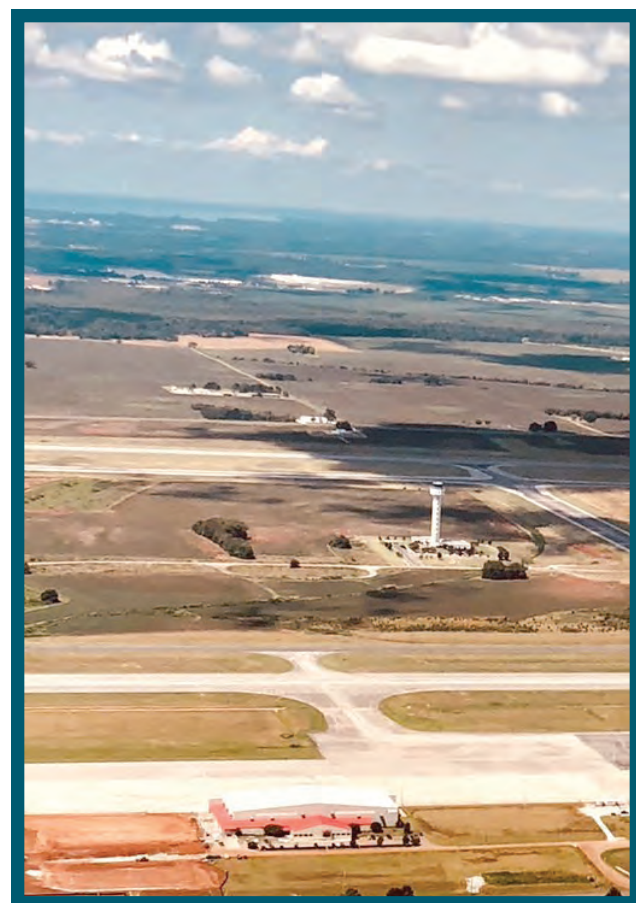
"We are looking at all the military and there are several different products for which we provide big plane surveillance solutions," he said. "One of the programs we are in the process of completing is a surveillance aircraft for the Jamaican Defence Force. In fact, we have a team in Jamaica right now from the Huntsville office finalizing delivery.

"Some of (Sierra Nevada's work) will be Army-related and local-related, but some of it will be international business as well."

Sierra Nevada is also known for its Dream Chaser spacecraft – a multi-mission space utility vehicle. For that reason, the company is also fostering key partnerships within the Alabama space community.

In fact, Sierra Nevada is currently working with Huntsville/Madison County and airport officials as they apply for Federal Aviation Administration licensing to officially designate Huntsville International Airport as a spaceport, making a Dream Chaser landing on one of the airport's commercial runways possible.

"Since building the Dream Chaser space craft,



we have been looking at all kinds of landing sites and Huntsville has been one of those selected cities," says Owings. "Huntsville has been awarded Phase II in that process and is currently undergoing further evaluation for that designation."

Owings also teased about more news ahead for the Huntsville market.

"This expansion isn't just based on the current business environment, but even more so on the projected business environment we are in," he said. "We are moving forward with building the new hangar based on those projections, but there is more to come." 🍊

BARON WEATHER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

to Aid Transportation

By Bud McLaughlin

So, how many times do you check the weather before hitting the road or the water?

Leave it to veteran meteorologist Bob Baron to help make those observations easier.

Baron, CEO and founder of Baron Services, has launched the Baron Critical Weather Institute, which will focus on the unique weather and safety challenges facing the transportation industry.

The goal is to create a comprehensive statewide weather observation network including road, river and atmospheric conditions. This will help ensure that citizens across Alabama will receive improved and more timely current conditions and forecasts on roadways and waterways as they travel across the state.

Baron said "the Tennessee Valley and the state of Alabama uniquely experience a broad range of weather events and contains terrain that extends from subtropical seashores to mountains along with

navigable waterways, seaways, highways and airways.

"Our state is home to numerous manufacturing powerhouses who produce transportation-related products, including automobiles, boats, railcars and aircraft."

The Institute's efforts to develop, coordinate and support world class instrumentation across the state will provide a building block for major weather research and development, particularly in transportation.

Guiding the Institute's development are Dr. Deborah Barnhart, CEO and Executive Director of the U.S. Space & Rocket Center; Dr. John Christy, Director of Earth System Science Center at UAH and the Alabama state climatologist; Dr. Steve Goodman, retired Chief Scientist, GOES-R, NOAA; Dr. Jack Hayes, retired director, U.S. National Weather Service; retired Air Force Col. Brian



BARON
Critical Weather Intelligence

Hastings, director of Alabama Emergency Management Agency; Daryl Herzmann, Systems Analyst, Iowa Environmental Mesonet; Dr. Sytske Kimball, Chair of University of South Alabama Department of Earth Sciences and director of South Alabama Mesonet; John McLaughlin, retired Chief Meteorologist KCCI, Fellow AMS; and Tom Thompson, Partner, Chief Technology Officer, Baron.

The Baron Critical Weather Institute will also provide education outreach, including helping student scientists understand the importance of weather instrumentation in studying the weather. 🍊

SMALL BUSINESS

TCU CONSULTING SERVICES: A Small Company Wears a Lot of Hats

By Kimberly Ballard

From the day many small companies open their doors for business, they dream of one day employing well-compensated, eminently qualified employees working in strategic positions.

They envision growth that broadens their original scope, opens the door to new business opportunities, and attracts diverse customers.

They see themselves challenging the competition with their own unique capabilities and opening strategic geographical locations – all while enjoying skyrocketing revenues.

If you are a small business facing what sounds like a daunting uphill climb, Alabama's TCU Consulting Services is proof you can achieve all these goals and remain relatively small, highly diverse, strategically located, and solidly competitive, while still experiencing high profitability.

Recently awarded the construction management services contract for the new LG Electronics solar panel plant in Huntsville, it will be TCU's first official manufacturing project, but not one outside of their skill sets and expertise.

"TCU Consulting Services is a company of architects, engineers, attorneys, contractors, and business-minded individuals and developers," said Andy Bernard, TCU program manager based in Huntsville. "Those skill sets all together ensure the customer gets what they need for a successful project. We are an extension of the owner, representing their interests and their checkbook. We think like an owner. We think like a contractor. We think like a designer.

"Although we have not been contracted from start to finish on a new manufacturing facility, our skill sets include people who have been project managers and consultants on manufacturing facilities and projects. We provide owner representation with oversight of

the design builder to help facilitate owner requests, logistics, purchasing, and scheduling. That's what we do every day and we are really good at it."

TCU Consulting Services opened in Alabama 12 years ago. They have 24 employees located strategically where their clients need them to be: Huntsville, Birmingham, Auburn and Montgomery,

For the last five years, TCU has been the program manager for Huntsville City Schools and according Bernard, the services they provide for LG Electronics are the same services they provide HCS, which included overseeing the building of the new Grissom High School in south Huntsville.

"On the educational front, we've done just over 1.2 billion in revenue from school projects and we are proud of that. So when it comes to managing large projects, we don't see a lot of difference in working with schools, a manufacturing facility, municipality work, or a corrections facility in terms of our capabilities and expertise," said Bernard. "There may be different engineering processes, and maybe some different construction systems, but it's still the same thing in a company like ours where everyone has multiple skill sets and wears several hats."

For example, Bernard said his degree is in civil engineering, but he is also a licensed general contractor and a certified energy manager.

"My skill sets allow me to think like a developer today and an engineer tomorrow," he said. "If we need architectural expertise to navigate a project, we have architects that work for us. We can call them in when their expertise and experience is needed."

This is a high point competitively and an advantage TCU often employs when responding to requests for proposals (RFPs).

"We are up against a lot of competition for every

job, but we proudly go up against the big guys and we do very well," he said. "Considering the companies we go up against are top notch professionals who are often much larger than we are, and equally as good at what they do."

The difference, he said, is ensuring that the owner go to contract with owner representation that is the right cultural fit.

"We let the client know at the interview that they need to seek the right fit for how they see the project going. If we fit that vision, then hire us. If we're not the right fit, then keep looking, and that's fine. We appreciate that," said Bernard.

Surprisingly, TCU is not outwardly looking to grow in size.

"We know who we are and that we have a lot to offer," he said. "We are a small company that wears many hats. Granted, we have to know which hat to wear at the right time in our business, but that's what makes us good at what we do – we know which hat to wear at the right time." 🍊



Grissom High School Lobby

Business Briefcase

Mitchell Plastics Expanding Its Huntsville Operation

Automotive Interior supplier Mitchell Plastics is adding to its Huntsville footprint.

The company's facility is on U.S. 72 in the Chase Industrial Park. The addition will be approximately 130,000 square feet and will allow the plant to grow with 12 new injection molding machines, a new paint line, expanded assembly area, additional shipping bays, and new offices. Construction is expected to begin in October.

Positions will be available for direct hire after completion of the expansion, estimated to be July 2019. Interested candidates can view all open positions at www.mitchellplastics.com and apply online.

In the past few years, Mitchell Plastics has expanded its operations with a focus on supporting global customer requirements. In March 2014, Mitchell Plastics opened a manufacturing facility in Queretaro, Mexico and, in July 2015, the company added a sales and engineering office in Munich. In September 2017, Mitchell Plastics opened a manufacturing facility in Sterling Heights, Mich., and, this past July, a plant in Saltillo, Mexico.

Mitchell Plastics is a privately held company based in Kitchener, Ontario.

Shelby Announces \$29.1M Grant for Huntsville International Airport

A \$29.1 million federal grant will be used to build another taxiway at Huntsville International Airport. The grant was announced by U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby.

"The city of Huntsville is growing at a rapid pace," Shelby said. "This new taxiway will allow for increased accessibility and efficiency for air traffic to and from North Alabama. Additionally, the funding will play a vital role in enhancing economic development throughout the region.

"As Huntsville continues to attract more business, it is essential that the city and surrounding area improve and modernize local infrastructure in order to meet the demands of its booming economy."

The construction of a 4,600-foot taxiway will provide access to airport property that can accommodate building up to 11 747-9 parking positions, as well as more than 600,000 square feet of hangar space – more than doubling the airport's current cargo capacity.

"The funds ... will impact our facility as a whole and include improvement to the Jetplex Industrial Park, International Intermodal Center and the airport, itself," said Airport Executive Director Rick Tucker. "The announcement ensures our ability to continue economic development initiatives within our region and positively impacts our entire state."

SMALL BUSINESS

When Rubber Chickens Fly, You Know the Madison Business Expo & Kids Day Was a Success

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photography by Kimberly Ballard

Madison celebrated its 150th Anniversary mixing business with food, history, kids and fun at the Madison Business Expo & Kids Day and guess what happened? The sky rained rubber chickens!

All day long it was Madison Depot 1869 at the Hogan YMCA. Sponsored by Jerry Damson Honda and hosted by the Madison Chamber of Commerce, 65 Madison businesses were on hand at the Expo giving out free information, demonstrating new products, and giving away treats to the kids.

Outside, food trucks served up anything from barbecue to ice cream, coffee and pizza. A moving garden train choo-chooed its way along the tracks ... all in preparation for the great Chicken Caper.

According to the Chamber's ver-



sion of the legend, business could get slow for shopkeepers in Madison Station (1869) during the Dog Days of Summer. To stimulate business, shopkeepers would tie coupons around the feet of several dozen chickens, then throw the live chickens off the roof to the shoppers below. Those who caught the chickens to retrieve the

coupon, got to keep the chicken too ... sort of a free chicken dinner!

"Chickens are birds and can fly a little, so no chickens were hurt while throwing them off the roof in 1869," said Pam Honeycutt, executive director of the Madison Chamber of Commerce.

"It was a very innovative and effective advertising tactic back then, but probably not a good idea today."

After putting their collective heads together, they decided a more contemporary re-enactment was needed.

With cooperation from the

Madison Fire Department, Madison County retailers tied thousands of dollars in savings and giveaway coupons to the spindly legs of five dozen rubber chickens, and the Fire Department dropped them from their aerial fire tower to the people below!

"We still managed to have fun, give away thousands of dollars in products and services, while creating a contemporary Chicken Caper of our own," said Honeycutt. "All the feedback so far has been very positive and the participation and support from our Chamber members is outstanding. That is what makes the Madison Business Expo & Kids Day so popular every year - we have a growing and thriving business community in Madison and we are here to celebrate it!" ♦

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DEVELOPMENT

Hollingsworth Breaks Ground on Region's Largest Spec Industrial Facility

By Kimberly Ballard /
Photos provided by
The Hollingsworth Cos.

All it takes is a mission and a vision for Huntsville's long-term strategic plan to build a multi-county regional economy in North Alabama to take shape.

One of the components of that vision dropped into place as the Huntsville-Madison County Chamber of Commerce and the Limestone County Economic Development Authority joined the Hollingsworth Cos. in breaking ground on the largest speculative industrial facility in North Alabama.

It is the 11th facility Hollingsworth has built in the SouthPoint Business Park, which has already provided hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars in investments. When finished, the new building will be home to more than 1.9 million square feet of industrial space.

Located off Interstates 65 and 565 and five miles from the Mazda Toyota Manufacturing plant, the park is suitable for high-growth manufacturing and distribution companies who benefit from a location along the I-65 corridor in North Alabama.

SouthPoint Business Park is already home to HDT Global, Custom Assembly, Redline Steel, Woodbridge, Supreme Beverage and Aldez.

While shovels moved dirt for the sprawling new building, local and state officials and members of the business community toured two industrial buildings now available in the park. The two buildings provide 173,888 and 109,080 square feet for companies looking to expand or relocate their manufacturing and distribution facilities.

"In spite of the economic pres-



sure of COVID-19 and this being an election year, we are very bullish on the North Alabama market," said Joe Hollingsworth, CEO of The Hollingsworth Cos., the largest nonurban industrial real estate developer and construction firm in the Southeast. "We have grown our business on the belief that American manufacturing will continue to prosper, and the Southeastern United States will lead this growth. I would like to thank the community for being willing to invest time, effort, and money into being a true partner in making this park successful.

"It is my belief that the next eight years will be the best economic period of our lives."

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle said the park will help ensure job creation and business development for the Rocket City.

"Over the past 10 years, we've been able to announce new and expanding companies in our community that have created 30,000

jobs," said Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle. "To do that requires many assets. You need a workforce, you need access to markets, and you need sites and buildings. Today's groundbreaking gives us another tool to help us in our continuing efforts to diversify

our economy and to make sure that anyone in Huntsville who wants a job can get a job.

"We thank the Hollingsworth Companies for its continued investment and belief in our community,"

Limestone County Commission Chairman Collin Daly said, "The groundbreaking of the largest speculative industrial building in North Alabama, despite being in the middle of a pandemic, is positive news for our county. We look forward to this new location assisting with the demand for industrial facilities needed for the continued growth in our county."

Brooks Kracke, president and CEO of the North Alabama Industrial Development Association, said, "This latest Hollingsworth building in Southpoint Industrial Park is much needed and is very timely in order to meet the demands of our regional growth." ■



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SIT DOWN WITH SUCCESS

Stephanie Kennedy-Mell

The Restaurant Business in the Time of COVID: Get Good at Bobbing and Weaving

By Kimberly Ballard

After she spent more than 20 years in the fashion and apparel industry, Stephanie Kennedy-Mell and her husband Matthew Mell opened the Church Street Wine Shoppe in Huntsville.

Now their Church Street Family owns Purveyor at the Avenue, Pourhouse at Stovehouse; Mazzara's at Stovehouse; and in spite of the uncertainty of COVID-19, they are about to open Catacomb, a speakeasy in the basement of Downtown Self Storage at the corner of 100 Jefferson Street and Clinton Avenue.

Four restaurants and a fifth on the way – aren't you facing unprecedented challenges?

I look at it as a time to work on your bobbing and weaving skills. The alternative is to get overwhelmed by it and it's easy enough outside of COVID for small business to get

overwhelmed. We take things as they come at us. Adjust, ask questions, and prioritize. Bobbing and weaving all the time and repeating our mantra #keepmovingforward.

How are you getting through it?

We live in an amazing community. It is so supportive of small business and we feel very lucky for that.

We are extremely cautious with our customers and our employees, thanks to relationships we have with people at the hospital.

They have guided us on how to sanitize our restaurants properly and thoroughly; how to deal with positive cases, and how to follow protocols so we can stay open and keep people safe.

They provide us with quick testing, so all our employees are tested for the virus before they are hired on at the Church Street Family. It must come back negative before

they can start.

What advice would you give someone getting into the hospitality business right now?

I'm not sure it's the best time to start a new business, so if you are not already established, I would advise them to hold off.

If they are already established, I say giving up is not the answer. Go slow, be cautious, and reassure people you have survived and are following protocols and guidelines.

How are things at Stovehouse?

It is a great socially distanced space, mostly outdoors, and the tables are socially distanced. It is a comfortable place to go right now to eat and drink, play bocce ball and enjoy music. It is very popular and still growing. The tenants talk to each other daily and have conversations about what is working and what is



not; and what we can do together.

And the future?

It is all about attitude. This too shall pass, so keep your chin up. Have a plan and execute your plan. You may have to alter that plan but stay with it. ■

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