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aCORRIDOR News



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Quarterly News & Updates of Mount Rogers Development Partnership, Inc.

aCorridor launches its new website

Virginia's aCORRIDOR launched its new website this spring and already has had at least one prospect contact the region after first visiting online at www.acorridor.com.

"One of the best marketing tools economic developers have today is a good website. And we wanted the aCorridor site to be dynamic and interactive and to include a lot of information for site consultants and industries to use when they are looking for a business location," said Andy Hall, executive director of Virginia's aCorridor.

The website features the leading attributes of the region—its location and its strong existing industry base.



"Featuring the success stories of the diverse industries we have operating here will be ongoing and constantly updated on the website," said Hall. "This is valuable information for those companies looking for industrial sites because it gives a firsthand look at what it's like to do business in our area."

www.acorridor.com
AFG's Roger Kennedy praises Virginia's aCorridor on the website home page.

The site also includes links to aCorridor county and city websites, companies, hospitals, educational institutions, etc. in the region, which will be updated and added to on a regular basis, Hall said.

"The new website will help our part of Virginia tell the rest of the world that we have sites and buildings, as well as the workforce, to offer new businesses looking for a location," said Suzanne Jennings, chairman of the Mount Rogers Development Partnership board and executive director of the Smyth County Community Foundation.

Nearly 600 jobs and \$82 million invested in region

Despite the difficult business climate of 2003, the aCorridor had 12 announcements by new and existing industry that resulted in 571 jobs and an \$82 million investment.

This is the message Executive Director Andy Hall presented at the spring meeting of the Mount Rogers Development Partnership's Board of Directors. He said this activity was "setting the stage" for 2004.

In early April, Hall reported that Virginia's aCorridor region had hosted 20 prospect visits in the fiscal year, primarily those interested in manufacturing.

"Considering the business climate this past year, the aftermath of 911, the war on terror and the war in Iraq, our region has kept up steady prospect activity and development. We are ready to move on in our marketing efforts to

attract business and add jobs to the region," said Hall.

He said the aCorridor's new website and print marketing materials will help the organization move into proactive marketing activities, including the aCorridor's participation in the Southwest Virginia Economic Development Alliance, brought about through Tobacco Commission funds.

From My Perspective....



Andy Hall
Executive Director

Anyone who knows me is pretty well aware of how methodical I can be at times. It's just the way I am. First things first. **Then** move on. Virginia's aCorridor took those first steps with me when I came onboard full time. Together we had many brainstorming sessions about who we really are and what our region has to offer. We re-branded the region and chose a new name and brand identity.

We were building the foundation, and now we're ready to get aggressive and proactive in marketing the region. We took the time to develop some great tools that will not only help us tell the story about what it's like to do business in

Marketing Activity

aCORRIDOR
REGION HAS HAD 20
PROSPECT VISITS
THIS FISCAL YEAR
11 MANUFACTURING,
OTHERS
DISTRIBUTION, CALL
CENTERS, ASSEMBLY
AND FOOD
PROCESSING

Getting site consultants to take a look at your region and recommend it to companies looking for a site has always been a challenge.

"In today's competitive environment consultants are de-selecting or eliminating communities from the mix, instead of selecting them," says Andy Hall.

What that means, says Hall, is that consultants really do their homework and research your community thoroughly "many times before we even hear from them." They have done their research, says Hall, and if the region is selected, most consultants already know which sites they want to see.

"That's why it's so important for a region like Virginia's aCorridor to have an information-rich website that answers questions for site consultants," says Hall.

Andy Hall represented Virginia's aCorridor at several trade shows during this fiscal year, and more are planned. Some of the counties sent their economic developers to trade shows and marketing missions along with the VEDP staff.

He also represented the aCorridor at the Southern Economic Development Council's automotive seminar and annual meeting, as well as the Virginia Economic Developers Association fall and spring conferences.

Virginia's aCorridor, but what it's like to live here, what there is to do, who is available to work and where employees can get the training and education they need to do today's sophisticated jobs. **If you haven't already done so, visit www.acorridor.com.** You'll see one of the most effective tools we will use in marketing the aCorridor.

Print materials complement the website, and we're planning face-to-face meetings and direct mail campaigns to reach our target audiences such as site consultants, industry executives and interested prospects.

Another substantial jump-start to our marketing efforts is the aCorridor's participation in the Southwest Virginia Economic Development Alliance.

The aCorridor has joined with the Virginia Coalfield Economic

Development Authority in an alliance for marketing Southwest Virginia. Through funding from the Tobacco Commission, the alliance is planning a special event for site consultants and prospects at the August NASCAR race at Bristol Motor Speedway. This relationship-building event will also include a hospitality tent hosted by Gov. Mark Warner and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP).

But probably the best part of being involved with this alliance is the research currently under way to target companies who are a "fit" for Southwest Virginia. The alliance has contracted with Chmura Economics & Analytics to re-research the companies and deliver a list of 100 target companies and the top six companies with active projects. Results are expected this fall.

I'm calling this the Proactive Marketing Phase we're entering into with an information-rich website, a marketing brochure package, our Bristol Motor Speedway event and research to determine the companies we need to go after.

We'll also be doing some selective advertising. Look for an aCorridor ad in the next issue of *Expansion Solutions* magazine. We plan to develop brochures that target specific industries, and we'll continue to work together with local economic developers in the aCorridor to establish marketing missions and attend trade shows along with the VEDP.

We have some really strong tools. And we're movin' on.



New marketing brochure

Existing industries expand across the region

AFG Glass and **Pepsi** were two of the region's biggest announcements last year and both have now become regional existing industries.

AFG began operations in its new Abingdon plant in late May, and Pepsi Bottling Group held its grand opening ceremonies June 4 at its new 334,000 sq. ft. plant in Wytheville that is operating three shifts.

Ed Wegener, AFG's plant manager, said the Abingdon facility has nearly 60 employees and will probably add 10 or 12 more in the next six to nine months. The modern glass coating facility is operating three shifts and is out of start-up mode and shipping product. The low emissivity glass coating produced at the plant is used to decrease energy costs.

Pepsi Bottling Group Chairman and CEO John Cahill said the Wytheville facility is the first Pepsi Bottling Group plant built from the ground up in almost a decade.

The Wytheville plant with 200 employees manufactures and/or distributes Pepsi products, including Aquafina, Tropicana fruit drinks, Dole single serve juices, SoBe fruit drinks and teas, Starbucks Doubleshot and Frappuccino and Lipton Iced Tea and Brisk.

Klöckner Pentaplast's \$34 million expansion project (108 jobs) is under



AFG Glass started operations in late May in its new facility in the Oak Park Center for Business and Industry in Abingdon. Three shifts and 60 employees have moved out of start-up mode to shipping product, according to Plant Manager Ed Wegener.

way, and another expansion in Bland County is expected to create 75 new jobs. **ABB Inc.** will expand its small power transformer manufacturing operations in Bland County, investing \$3 million.

Another expansion announced last year was **Musser Lumber Sales'** plans to invest \$3 million to construct a gas-fired wood kiln, and add storage and production facilities and a retail outlet.

Expansion is under way at **Wytheville Technologies, Inc.**, in Progress Park. The manufacturer of automotive steering components is investing \$31 million and expanding its manufacturing operation with a new 150,000 sq. ft. facility near its present plant.

Expansion is under way at **General Dynamics Armament and Technical Products** in Smyth County. This company announced last summer it would invest \$6.5 million to relocate its Resin Transfer Molding (RTM) operation to the Marion, Virginia facility, creating 120 new jobs. Another successful aCorridor business, **Guardian Industries Corp.** in Galax is undergoing a \$2.5 million expansion. The manufacturer of glass products is investing in building improvements and equipment and adding a product line called laminated glass which is mainly used in window applications for safety, sound control and ultraviolet protection products.

Another aCorridor company, **Utility Trailer** is undergoing an \$11.5 million expansion that is expected to create 100 jobs. Utility Trailer employs about 700 at its Smyth County facility and the expansion and modernization plans will allow the company to increase its production of refrigerated trailers. Utility also has a manufacturing plant in Washington County.

Construction is under way in Wythe County's Progress Park for Wytheville Technologies, Inc.'s new 150,000 sq. ft. facility.



Inc. magazine ranks aCorridor city among top in nation

Bristol listed in top 25 small cities for business



In its March 2004 issue, *Inc.* magazine ranked Bristol, Virginia 23rd among the nation's small cities for doing business.

The aCorridor city was ranked among areas with up to 150,000 jobs.

"It's pretty gratifying when a magazine of national stature notices Bristol and the kind of things we're doing here to attract business—things like the improvements through Bristol Virginia Utilities and Optinet to make infrastructure improvements to make Bristol friendlier to business," said Mayor Jerry Wolfe in the Bristol Herald Courier.

The magazine used a growth index that reflected increases in the number of jobs from 1993-2003. These figures included a mixture of jobs in manufacturing, financial services, business and professional services, information,

retail and wholesale trade, transportation and utilities, leisure and hospitality, and government.

Bristol's mayor said the city plans to capitalize on the new recognition by including it in its marketing efforts.

"We can use this as verification that the things we are doing are pro-business," Wolfe said. "We'll include this in our marketing materials—certainly for companies that want to relocate but aren't necessarily looking for a large metropolitan area."

Workforce needs 'soft' skills

Workers who possess 'soft skills' such as math, safety, honesty, courtesy, grammar, eye contact and reliability have what many employers are looking for, according to a recently completed survey of employers in one aCorridor county.

Last June the Smyth County Industry Council commissioned an outside firm to create Workforce Profile 2003 through interviews with more than 30 industry leaders in the county. Their goal was to learn why citizens continue to suffer

joblessness as the manufacturing sector grows locally, creating new jobs top managers say they cannot fill. Workers with 'hard skills' such as the capabilities to operate machinery are available, the study says, but potential hires lack the 'soft skills.' The Workforce Profile found that 'soft skills' were as important regardless of industry or job type and could have a major impact on training new workers.



Around the aCORRIDOR. . .

J. Thomas Fowlkes of Bristol is the new Chairman of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) Board of Directors. Fowlkes is managing director of Bankstreet Partners, LLC in Bristol and also serves as the Ninth District representative for VEDP on the Mount Rogers Development Partnership board. Fowlkes recently chaired the VEDP board's first meeting held in Southwest Virginia at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon.

Galax will get a \$100,000 federal grant to develop an exhibit design plan for a visitors center under con-

struction at nearby Fishers Peak. Rep. Rich Boucher, D-Abingdon, announced approval of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Agency grant in May. **The city will work with the National Council for Traditional Arts on plans for museum-quality displays and interpretive exhibits at the center.** The visitors center is in the last part of construction with the development of the Blue Ridge Music Center, a federally funded project celebrating the historical roots of traditional American music in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia and North Carolina.

Fidelity Investments of Boston, one of the world's largest providers of financial services, earlier this year announced its purchase of TEDS, an aCorridor-based software development and consulting company. TEDS, started by a local entrepreneur in 1991, offers automated software systems and services for corporate learning and human capital development and management. **Credited with having created the first learning management system (LMS), TEDS offers customer-oriented technology solutions aimed at continuous workforce improvement on behalf of business objectives.**

Partnership welcomes new board members

As a result of elections and retirements, the Mount Rogers Development Partnership Board of Directors has added some new members.

Recent additions to the board include Claude Blankenship, who represents the Bristol VA City Council; Cindy Rudy, Controller at The Nautilus Group's Independence Virginia Division; and Jonathan Sweet, County Administrator for Bland County.

Other new members include Marvin Perry, representing the Smyth County Board of Supervisors; John B. Roberts Sr., representing the Washington County Board of Supervisors; and Brian Spencer, representing Carroll County Board of Supervisors.

The board elected a new slate of officers at its annual organizational meeting June 24 in Wytheville. Suzanne Jennings was re-elected chairman for a second term. Other officers are Ralph Tuggle, vice chairman, Pete Montague, secretary, and Claude Blankenship, treasurer.



New additions to the Mount Rogers Development Partnership Board of Directors are, from left, Claude Blankenship, representing Bristol, VA City Council; Cindy Rudy, Controller at Nautilus in Independence; and Jonathan Sweet, County Administrator of Bland County.

New members of the Mount Rogers Development Partnership Board of Directors are John B. Roberts Sr., left, representing Washington County Board of Supervisors, and Marvin R. Perry, representing Smyth County Board of Supervisors.



Around the aCORRIDOR. . .



Virginia Governor Mark Warner recently announced the first-ever strategic plan for the Virginia wine industry, Vision 2015. A news release said Virginia's wine industry has experienced rapid expansion in recent years making it one of the fastest growing agricultural sectors in the state. **aCorridor wineries, Abingdon Vineyard and Winery and Davis Valley Winery and Vineyard in Rural Retreat**, are two of the 87 wineries and 250 grape producers in the Commonwealth. Virginia's wineries, combined with grape production enterprises, contribute \$69-\$95.7 mil-

lion each year to the state's economy.

Tom Taylor, executive director of the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, was nominated for and received the Patriotic Employer Award from the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. Brian Martin, a public administration specialist at MRPDC, and a member of the Air Force National Guard, nominated Taylor for the award. Taylor is an ex-officio member of the Mount Rogers Development Partnership Board.



The Joint Industrial Development Authority of Wythe County, Wytheville and Rural Retreat was nominated as one of the top three finalists in the 2004 Economic Development Administration's Awards of Excellence. The Joint IDA was selected in the Rural Economic Development category. Nominees were evaluated on how effectively they used innovative, market-based strategies to improve rural economic development results.



www.aCorridor.com

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Virginia's aCorridor

is the region of southwestern Virginia that includes the City of Bristol and the City of Galax and the Counties of Washington, Smyth, Wythe, Bland, Carroll and Grayson

What are 'soft skills' in the workforce?

The Smyth County Industry Council last year conducted a Workforce Profile that identified 'soft skills' new hires need to possess. Here are some of those skills:

- › math
- › safety
- › courtesy
- › honesty
- › grammar
- › flexibility
- › team skills
- › eye contact
- › cooperation
- › follow rules
- › adaptability
- › self-directed
- › good attitude
- › writing skills
- › driver's license
- › dependability
- › advanced math
- › self-supervising
- › good references
- › being drug free
- › good attendance
- › personal energy
- › work experience
- › ability to measure
- › interpersonal skills
- › valuing education
- › personal chemistry
- › willingness to learn
- › good common sense
- › critical thinking skills
- › knowledge of fractions
- › coming to work on time
- › wanting to do a good job

See page 4 for more information on 'soft skills' and Workforce Profile.