



Blount Partnership

Annual Report
2020

BLOUNT PARTNERSHIP

Working with diligence, tenacity and determination, the Blount Partnership has established itself as the standard by which economic development, chamber of commerce and tourism development are measured statewide.

And with an attitude of never letting downturns get the best of them, the momentum generated by the huge number of jobs and capital investment brought to the county over the last eight years breed the optimism for continued growth.

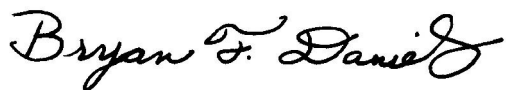
Per that ambition to make Blount County a leading economic driver in the state, the Blount Partnership will continue to strengthen the regional economy while enhancing residents' quality of life. By investing in the Blount Partnership through Chamber of Commerce memberships, funding of the Economic Development Board of Blount County and the Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority, you are helping to create jobs, attract new business, recruit a talented workforce and improve Blount County's competitive positioning and economic prosperity.

The long term goal of the Blount Partnership is to create primary, high-value jobs with competitive annual salaries with a significant capital investment. It also plans to work towards creating more opportunities for the business and family visitors as well as group travel while increasing educational and training programs for the business community.

Additionally, by hosting numerous educational training workshops and seminars while continuing to be an advocate for the business community by making federal, state and local elected officials available to its members, the Blount Partnership remains the only place where people can be heard on an individual basis. Its strong commitment to workforce development is the key to shaping the county's future economic growth.

The Blount Partnership thanks you for your contribution to enhance our economy and quality of life. The importance of the role our partners play in the economic development of Blount County cannot be overstated.

Sincerely,



Bryan Daniels
Blount Partnership President/CEO



Chris Soro
Chair, Blount Partnership Joint Operating Committee

VISION STATEMENT

The Blount Partnership will earn a national reputation as the primary catalyst for this region's competitive success and economic prosperity, steeped in strong tradition and leadership.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Blount Partnership is to serve its members and stakeholders while promoting economic growth and stability, fostering community development and enhancing the overall quality of life in the region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19.

The term itself seems innocuous. But the effects this virus placed on the worldwide community has far reaching effects that will not be known for many years. Despite it, the Blount Partnership became a stabilizing voice the business community could turn to for reliable information.

Poised to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Blount County of Chamber of Commerce in 2020 and all the good things that come with remembering the multitude of accomplishments, it took a sudden turn in mid-March as the first cases of COVID-19 crossed the oceans and made their way to the United States.

Luckily, the Chamber was able to hold its celebration one week before the beginning of the pandemic and a magnificent event was held at the Airport Hilton's newly opened conference space to the delight of more than 700 attendees.

With memorabilia from the past 100 years, including vintage automobiles, the crowd was regaled with music from event band, *Party on the Moon*.

With in-person events canceled across the board, the Blount Partnership pivoted to holding virtual events via video conferencing. Subsequently, the buzz word for 2020 became -- Zoom -- as in the brand name for the video conferencing software nearly everyone latched onto for connecting.

In addition to a few in-person coffee clubs, ribbon cuttings and afternoon mixers, networking events were limited to online. The lone event that saw significant success was the Grains and Grits Spirits Festival held in Townsend.

As a gateway to the Smoky Mountains, Blount County ranked eighth among Tennessee's 95 counties in visitor expenditures at \$425.55 million in 2019 according to the Economic Impact of Travel on Tennessee Counties report issued by the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development and Gov. Bill Lee.

Blount County's \$425.55 million in visitor spending represents an increase of nearly \$18 million from 2018 and over \$168 million from 2009. In fact, on an average day in 2019, tourist spending in Blount County generated \$1.165 million in daily expenditures and created \$309.560 in daily payroll and \$39,408 in local tax revenues.

Because of the taxes generated by visitor activity in Blount County, each household sees a savings of \$754 in local and state taxes.

Tourism jobs in the county were at an all-time high of 3,690 which also led to an all-time high payroll of \$112.99 million.

Local tax receipts of \$13.38 million was the sixth-highest total in the state, while state tax receipts totaled \$23.45 million, both records for the county.

From 2018 to 2019, Blount county saw marked percentage increases in visitor expenditures (4.3%), payroll (2.9%), employment (1.2%), state tax receipts (5.1%) and local tax receipts (3.9%).

Economic development continued at its rapid pace as several projects were pursued and many still in the works. The end of the year saw a flurry of activity leading to significant job announcements and company expansions in 2021.

The Chamber continued to be a source of energy in the community while serving as a collaborative force that brings opposing sides together to focus on the getting the best results that make Blount County stronger. As the best way to make connections for businesspeople, the chamber, using online video services, continued to host networking events, ribbon cuttings, business development workshops, human resource and managerial seminars to aid businesses of all sizes in their quest for new customers.

Overall, 2020 was a year of survival and adaptation to technology as we learned a new term, "social distancing," and wearing a mask in public was expected as a sign of protecting public health.

BLOUNT PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

COVID-19 Assistance for Chamber Members

- Reached out to every member multiple times via staff, ambassadors and electronic communications.
- Worked with 44 members on adjusting their investment schedule.
- Launched a dedicated webpage on COVID-19 resources and sent daily emails on the latest updates.
- Staff participated in over 100 COVID-19 information sessions and advocacy related calls.
- Converted in-person networking to monthly virtual networking.
- Launched two Facebook groups. One focused on the food and restaurant industry with 5007 followers. The second focused on available jobs with 1066 followers.
- Converted all workshops and seminars to a virtual platform. Held 25 COVID-19 related briefings totaling over 500 registrants.
- Issued 11 business relief grants to small business totaling \$24,000 and circulated over 70 gift cards in the community as small businesses began to reopen.
- Launched re-opening campaign via social media and in-person visits by staff and Ambassadors.

COVID-19 Honors

- Due to our work during COVID-19 and out of 40 business and organizations across the state, we received a COVID-19 Pandemic Response Award Special Recognition by the TN Chamber of Commerce.

COVID-19 Legislation

- Pushed for the passage of the Safe Harbor legislation and the passage of liquor by the drink in Blount County.



The Blount Partnership was ahead of the curve with the first COVID-19 update held on March 13 with community leaders from healthcare, education, legal, public relations and manufacturers.

Chamber Membership Connections

- Retained 50% of new dollars raised in membership event totaling \$94,074.
- Retained 90% of all upgrades from membership event resulting \$105,000.
- Ambassadors made 2500 membership retention calls.
- Staff did over 500 one-on-one business assists.
- Increased the number of participants in Small Business Saturday from 12 in 2014 to 46 in 2020.
- Held 14 ribbon cuttings.

Social Media Connections

CHAMBER FACEBOOK (Yearly increases)

- 6434 Followers +1772 28%
- 5562 Likes +730 13%
- Average 1501 page views per day
- 73% of followers & likes are women

PEACEFUL SIDE FACEBOOK (Yearly increases)

- 57,684 Followers +7465 13%
- 56,460 Likes +4886 9%
- Average 8008 page views per day
- 74% of followers & likes are women

BLOUNT PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

BLOUNT AREA JOBS FACEBOOK (Yearly increases)

- 1831 Followers +378 21%
- 1790 Likes +346 19%
- Average 212 page views per day
- 72% of followers & likes are women

PARTNERSHIP FACEBOOK (Yearly increases)

- 1667 Followers +398 24%
- 1456 Likes +190 13%
- Average 295 page views per day
- 69% of followers & likes are women

FACEBOOK GROUP FOR FOOD

- 5007 Followers Began in March during COVID-19

FACEBOOK GROUP FOR JOBS

- 1066 Followers Began in March during COVID-19

PEACEFUL SIDE INSTAGRAM

- 15,937 Followers +5159 32%

CHAMBER INSTAGRAM

- 1859 Followers +822 44%

PEACEFUL SIDE TWITTER

- 5434 Followers +1575 29%

CHAMBER TWITTER

- 2282 Followers +582 26%

PARTNERSHIP LINKEDIN

- 638 Followers +390 61%

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LINKEDIN

- 60 Followers Page started in October 2020

Communications

- Developed a 2020 communications plan for the Partnership with an emphasis on social media.
- Through March, made monthly appearances on WATE-TV to promote community events in Blount County. Made additional appearances on WBIR-TV and WVLT-TV.
- Continued local radio advertising with WKVL and WBCR on the football broadcasts for William Blount, Maryville and Alcoa High Schools.
- Sponsored The Sports Page weekly sports talk radio program. Produced on Facebook Live, the Blount Partnership is branded on the screen along with two 30-second radio ads.
- Used the billboard located on U.S. 129 by Foch St. in Maryville to promote the Partnership.
- Continued to use the Facebook Live option to show all ribbon cuttings.



The Blount Chamber held its 100th Anniversary Celebration in the newly renovated convention and meeting space at the Airport Hilton.

BLOUNT PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Changed programs in the lobby monitors to streamline the updating of events and information.
- Continue to build relationships with media representatives in print and electronic media.
- Email stats: 77 emails sent on behalf of members that get email campaign or purchase
- TV interviews: Conducted over two dozen interviews with all three networks
- Print interviews: Conducted over 20 interviews with The Daily Times and News Sentinel
- Published the Blount Chamber's 100-year anniversary book.
- Implemented Zoom & Microsoft Teams video conferencing platforms for all staff, allowing for continued meeting capabilities thru the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Implemented a "Work from Home" environment for all staff during the April/May office COVID-19 shutdown allowing all staff operations to continue
- Installed an Arlo Pro 3 video camera system at both the Chamber & TVC locations monitoring facilities for safety issues
- Upgraded the audio/visual system in the large board room with Prince Technologies allowing for greater communications activities
- Completed upgrade to a 200 Mbps fiber connection, allowing for quicker data processing and providing more bandwidth for video conferencing
- Completing an upgrade to a "Cloud Hosted" VoIP telephone system in mid-November allowing for better telephone communications among staff and the community

Economic Development

HONORS

- Received AEDO accreditation from the International Economic Development Council

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

- RFIs – 20 Blount County submissions in partnership with TNECD and TVA



Groundbreaking was held in October for the Ruth and Steve West Workforce Development Center on the Pellissippi State Community College Blount County campus. Pictured (l-r): Steve, Ruth, Mary Beth and Charles West.

- Business Expansion and Retention Visits
- Strengthened Maryville College partnership for ED Projects
- Strengthened ORNL partnership for ED Projects
- Strengthened UT CIS and UT Research Park partnership

COVID RESPONSE

- Responded to needs of industrial park tenants and manufacturers
- Took part in TN Economic Recovery Group

COMMUNITY

- Worked downtown Maryville Community projects
- Spearheaded Sky City Initiative for entrepreneurs

CONFERENCES & ASSOCIATIONS

- IEDC Nashville Virtual Booth – Promoted IEDC 2021, attended conference
- Site Selectors Guild – Meet the Site Selectors to promote Blount County
- SEDC Conference
- TN Business Leaders Group – Local & state elections
- TVA Target Market Specialist Showcase on Blount County

BLOUNT PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Driving/FAM Blount County tours with ECD – February and December
- TEP Meet the Consultants – Dallas, Greeneville, Chicago
- TEP Board of Directors – East TN Rep

TECHNOLOGY

- Redesigned BlountIndustry.com
- Worked with City of Maryville on creating GIS story boards for industrial parks
- Used Salesforce software to upload past and current economic development projects into a centralized database

PROMOTION

- Manufacturing Month activities included shared member events, social media posts, billboards, BRE visits, Career Connection virtual job fair
- Marketed Blount County digitally and in-print on various websites and magazines

COMMUNITY PROJECTS IN PROCESS

- Alcoa Foundation Mountain Biking Park (still in process)
- Aviation Academy (still in process)
- Spec Building in Industrial Parks (still in process)

INDIVIDUAL TRAINING

- Continue training and education with IEDC to work towards CECD
- Get out the vote
- Conducted social media campaign for liquor by the drink. Measure approved by 70% of registered voters. Measure failed three times earlier by same margin.

Programming & Events

- **Improved Processes:** Implemented a digitized recordkeeping system for all W9's, with the digital versions stored via secure access on the office server.
- **Streamlined Payments:** Implemented a scanning procedure for Credit Card payments for the digitized recordkeeping of all credit card receipts on the office server
- **Digitized Paperwork:** Implemented a scanning procedure for all deposit receipts and supporting documents for the digitized recordkeeping on the office server of all payments receiver
- **100th Anniversary Celebration:** Planned and implemented anniversary event with Lisa Skinner for more than 500 people at the Airport Hilton.
- **Virtual Job Fair:** This event focused on manufacturing and STEM jobs. Multiple employers reporting hires; and sponsorship dollars were gained for Chamber fundraising.
- **National Job Signing Day:** This event celebrated students who were offered jobs following internships. We brought in the students and the employers and took photos, featuring them on social media and billboard.



National Job Signing Day was held with individual students and pushed out on social media and area billboards.

- **Political Pop-In Virtual Event:** Worked with all candidates running for local, state, and federal offices to record messages for voters. The videos were extremely successful and played over 3,300 times on Facebook and YouTube alone.

BLOUNT PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

- **Hype Recruitment Video:** This video is extremely popular and has gained a lot of momentum. It is playing in the airport, via social media and will play on Charter Cable TV. Numerous businesses have asked to use the video. Photo shoot for many of the scenes featured in the video.
- **Pathways 2 Careers Project:** Worked with high schools and post-secondary to make pathway charts for students – laying out a career path from high school courses, to post-secondary course, to actual jobs available in our community. Visual graphics are being created.
- **College Virtual Career Fairs:** Sponsored college career fairs across East Tennessee to help spread the word about Blountareajobs.com
- **Social Media & Billboard Campaigns:** Currently running a Facebook campaign for DENSO in Florida, Kentucky, and Michigan (targeting areas of layoffs). We also experienced growth in all of our social media outlets for Blount Area Jobs.
- **Workforce Committees:** All Workforce Committees and their projects have continued monthly.
- **Manufacturing Month:** A month of activities to celebrate Manufacturing Month – including the Career Connection event, social media campaigns, billboard campaign, DENSO panel interviews for high schools, and we assisted Pellissippi with virtual presentations for the schools.
- **Tennessee Valley Youth Apprenticeships:** Have three US Department of Labor certified apprenticeships now developed in IT, Construction Maintenance and Culinary (with Blackberry Farm)
- **Airport Advertising Campaign:** Ads for Workforce & Tourism now displayed in terminal and baggage claims at McGhee Tyson Airport.
- **GIVE Grants:** Continued to move forward Blount County GIVE grants. Worked hand-in-hand with Pellissippi State to hire grant directors and career navigator to operate the grant.
- **East TN Local Workforce Development Authority:** Served as a liaison helping establish response and report information on one-stop operators during the pandemic.
- **U.S. Chamber Education & Workforce Task Force:** Jessica Belitz served as a member of a US Chamber working group tasked with putting together a plan to encourage state assessments in the schools amid COVID.
- **Blount County Job Board:** We are working on a complete redesign of the job board. This site includes a comprehensive way to search for jobs and for employers to search for workforce. Job seekers can upload resumes and apply for jobs on the site. It will address quality of life aspects that many young job seekers are looking for.
- **Arconic Foundation Global Internship Program:** Continued to serve as business development director on this grant, connecting interns to employers.



The Walls for Women mural was commissioned by the Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority to commemorate the women's suffrage movement and the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment.



Grains and Grits Spirits Festival continues to be a growing success as the signature event for the Tennessee Distillers Guild.

BLOUNT PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

- **8th Grad Career Exploration Fair:**
Provided multiple avenues through a partnership with Junior Achievement (JA) for virtual career exploration for middle school students – safely in their classroom, as the large fair was not an option this year. We hope to see these implemented soon in the school systems.

Tourism

MEETING SPACE

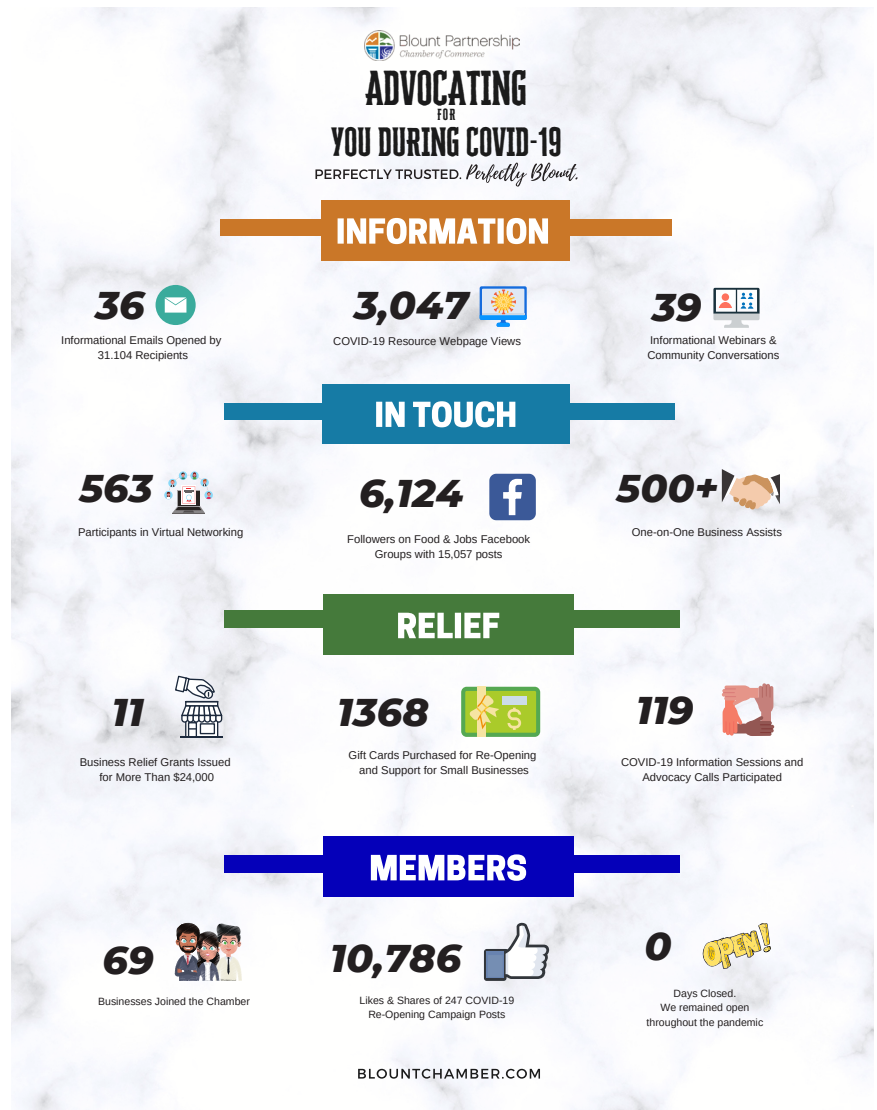
- Opened new conference space at the Knoxville Hilton Airport
- Launched new marketing for Smoky Mountain Meetings (website, social media, marketing materials and email blast)
- Developed a larger presence on the Meeting Planner site CVENT
- Due to COVID, secured one trade show to promote new conference space

DIGITAL PERFORMANCE

- Saw growth of all social media channels
- Launched new blog to gain more traction to website which is being redesigned
- Gathered more video and photo assets to market to the leisure traveler
- Launched social media campaign specific to families, empty nesters, millennials & generation Z

COVID-19 TRAVEL

- Retargeted local and regional travel with staycations
- Launched safety campaign to promote and restore confidence to the leisure traveler that Blount County is open and safe
- Worked with the Chamber to fund and aid local



This graphic highlights the Blount Partnership's communications efforts from March-June as we worked tirelessly to keep the community informed of all the rapidly changing COVID-19 plans for our businesses and citizens.

businesses with new initiatives

- Received a \$281,000 CARES Act Grant to use for COVID Safety messaging towards tourism

PROJECTS

- Purchased additional land next to the Townsend Visitor Center
- Developing a new 2021 vacation guide
- Produced Grains and Grits Festival
- Commissioned Walls for Women mural in downtown Maryville

BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

Blount Partnership Joint Operating Committee

Chair Chris Soro, C2RL, Inc.
Vice Chair Chuck Alexander

Chamber Representatives:

Chair Rick Shepard
Chair-Elect Trevis Gardner, MKAA
Past Chair Chris Soro, C2RL, Inc.

Economic Development Board Representatives:

Chair Fred Lawson
Vice Chair Matt Murray, University of Tennessee
Past Chair Chuck Alexander

Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority Representatives:

Chair Tim Seay, Century 21 Smoky Mountain Real Estate
Vice Chair Jewell Overton, ProNova Solutions
Past Chair Bryan Cable, Hilton Knoxville Airport

Blount County Chamber of Commerce Board

Chair Rick Shepard
Chair-Elect Trevis Gardner, Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority
Chair – Chamber Foundation Bob Booker, DENSO
VIP Chair Christi Fightmaster, Pugh CPAs
VIP Chair-Elect Stephen Deucker, Cirrus Aircraft
Auto Sales & Services, Transportation & Petroleum Robert Kendall Case, Smoky Mtn. Harley-Davidson
Construction, Building Trades & Suppliers Ben Pinnell, Hickory Construction
Finance & Professional Tony Thompson, Pinnacle Financial Partners
Government & Public Utilities Tom Hatcher, Blount County Circuit Court Clerk
Hotel/Accommodations, Restaurants & Recreation Richard Maples, Kinzel Springs Partnership
Individuals/Non-Profits Vanessa Painter, Blount County Habitat for Humanity
Manufacturers, Wholesalers & Agriculture Bryan Hayes, Clayton Homes
Retail/Service/Real Estate/Insurance Drew Miles, Miles Insurance Agency
Board Member at Large Mike Lutheran, Royal Metal Powders
Board Member at Large Kathy Johnson, CBBC Bank
One Year Director Russ Bradberry, Cherokee Millwright
One Year Director Brian Davis, Danny Davis Electrical Contractors
One Year Director Dennis Dockery, Michael Brady Architects
One Year Director Joy Carver, Dandy Lions
One Year Director Tracy Queen, ICC International
One Year Director Keeli Boyce, Express Strategic Services

Ex-Officio Members:

Chair, Economic Development Board Fred Lawson
Chair, Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority.. Tim Seay, Century 21 Smoky Mountain Real Estate
Legal Counsel Matt Haralson, Kizer & Black, Attorneys
City of Alcoa Mark L. Johnson, City Manager
Blount County Ed Mitchell, County Mayor Blount County Government
City of Maryville Greg McClain, City Manager

BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

Economic Development Board

Chair	Fred Lawson
Vice Chair	Matt Murray, University of Tennessee
Secretary/Treasurer	Gary Hensley
Past Chair	Chuck Alexander
Member	Greg Wilson, First Horizon
Member	Joe Dawson
Member	Monica Gawet, Tennessee Marble Company, Inc.
Blount County	Ed Mitchell, Mayor
City of Alcoa	Mark Johnson, City Manager
City of Maryville	Greg McClain, City Manager
Ex-Officio Members:	
Legal Counsel	Robert N. Goddard, Goddard & Gamble
Chamber Chair	Rick Shepard

Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority Board

Chair	Tim Seay, Century 21 Smoky Mountain Real Estate
Vice Chair	Jewell Overton, ProNova Solutions
Secretary/Treasurer	Boyce Smith, Walmart
Business/Resident Representative Alcoa	Bryan Cable, Hilton Knoxville Airport
Business/resident Representative Walland/Townsend Area	Chad Rochelle, Dogwood Cabins
Business/Resident Representative Maryville	Dr. Tom Bogart, Maryville College
City of Alcoa Representative	Mark L. Johnson, City Manager
City of Maryville Representative	Greg McClain, City Manager
Blount County Mayor or County Commission Representative	Jeff Jopling, Blount County Commissioner
Chamber Representative	Rick Shepard

Blount Partnership Staff

President/CEO	Bryan Daniels
Vice President	Tammi Ford
Director of Events & Partnership Programs	Jessica Belitz
Director of Economic Development	Lauren Emert
Director of Membership	Jessica Hahn
Director of Accounting & Human Resources	Bruce Kerr
Director of Tourism	Kim Mitchell
Director of Communications	Jeff Muir
Executive Administrative Assistant	Brenda Farner
Accounting & HR Administrative Assistant	Ann Watson
Administrative Assistant	Deborah Nye
Administrative Assistant	Amy Lawson
Administrative Assistant	Claire Carter
Administrative Assistant	Afton Dobbins
Maryville Welcome Center Host	Kasey Ferguson
Townsend Welcome Center Host	Sharon Thornton
Facilities Maintenance	Robert Galyon



Glenn Shepard Seminar



DENSO ribbon cutting for newest facility.



TN Department of Tourism Commissioner Mark Ezell (center) tours new meeting space at the Airport Hilton.



Partnered with the Tennessee Chamber for an opioid epidemic discussion.



Holding a state legislative briefing with Sen. Art Swann and Reps.



Ribbon cutting at Pure Magic car wash.



Congressman Tim Burchett was presented the Spirit of Enterprise Award from the U.S. Chamber.



Ambassador chair Aaron Killian recognizes the Ambassador of the Year Tonia Latham.