



Maury County . . . a diverse area, with a combination of lifestyles and workforce components.



Courthouse & West 7th

Hanging on to its Old South roots and blending in a healthy quantity of New South progress have proven to be a recipe for success for Maury County. Located in the heart of Middle Tennessee and home to a diverse mix of past and present resources, Maury County, which saw the arrival of its first settlers over 200 years ago in 1806, preserves its past even as its citizens look forward to an exciting future. From the annual Mule Day celebration in Columbia, and the county's impressive array of historic home sites, to the General Motors plant and other recent additions on the manufacturing front, Maury County has something to offer everyone.

With I-65 cutting through the county and I-840 just to the north, Maury County's proximity to Nashville in Davidson County, as well as Williamson County, is definitely an asset. "This is a diverse area, with a combination of lifestyles and workforce components," says Frank Tamberrino, president of the Maury Alliance. "From north to south, starting at Spring Hill, you have the GM plant, a white collar community, a good workforce, transportation and opportunities, all straddling the Williamson County line."

"In Columbia, you have a balanced economic mix. Columbia is basically the hub of southern Middle Tennessee—close enough to

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be a vital part of the Nashville region—but the hub of activities for the majority of the southern cities in Tennessee. “In Columbia,” Tamberrino says, “we have manufacturing and retail centers. It’s a nice blend of economic opportunities. In Mt. Pleasant, we have a manufacturing and blue-collar type of environment. Mt. Pleasant is a nice, small town with a good work ethic and traditional industry.”

Perhaps the most significant catalyst for economic growth in Maury County was the advent of the GM plant. Waymon L. Hickman, senior chairman at First Farmers & Merchants Bank, has been credited as the man behind bringing the GM plant to Maury County, which made national news in July 1985.

At the time, Hickman was working as a banker and serving as the chairman of the economic development committee for the Chamber of Commerce. Lamar Alexander, Tennessee’s governor at that time, asked Hickman to be the liaison between the State of Tennessee and General Motors in the process of working out the arrangements for General Motors to come to Tennessee. “It was an exciting time because it was a national search—one of the largest non-utility investments made by an industrial company at that time—and the press was everywhere,” Hickman says.

“General Motors, leading up to its announcement of their plan to locate a plant in Tennessee in 1985, visited 40 states and considered approximately 1,000 com-

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munities as possibilities for the launch of its plant,” Hickman recalls. “They chose Maury County for many reasons, including location, work ethic and state government. And this has proven to be a real plus for our commu-



Courthouse

nity,” he says understatedly. We had lost the phosphate industry at that time and were in need of a boost for our economy and a company that would provide job opportunities. Now, with over 4,000 employees at the Spring Hill plant, the promise of the GM plant has come to fruition.”

With the arrival of the plant and new jobs—and the inevitable new growth—came the need for a unified economic development push. The Maury Alliance, a cohesive leadership entity designed to help businesses succeed in Maury County through a stable, diversified economic business and tax base and increased job opportunities, was created in 1999—a combination of the three city chambers (Columbia, Spring Hill and Mt. Pleasant) and the county’s economic development commission.

Business recruitment also falls under the purview of The Maury Alliance. “Recruiting businesses that boost our economy is a large part of what we do, and our efforts have proven quite successful this year,” Tamberrino says,



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of Office and Industrial Properties) recently where I provided an overview of what's going on in Maury County from the office and industrial standpoint," Tamberrino says. "Property is moving fast in the county, a sure sign of economic stability."

On the residential real estate front, Tamberrino reports that Spring Hill has over 10,000 lots that have been approved for home building. Of those lots, 6,777 are on the Maury County side of the line. In Columbia, there are over 3,000 lots that have been approved for home sites. "In terms of future development, with the approximate 10,000 home sites available in the county, that translates to approximately 25,000 people moving to the area in the

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referring to the statistic that shows only two counties in Middle Tennessee have announced over 1,000 new jobs this year—Davidson and Maury counties. Several new companies recently have chosen Maury County as a promising place to do business, including auto-2auto.com (Internet auto sales); Al's Garden Art, a manufacturing plant for high-end concrete products out of California; W.R. Grace Performance Chemicals, which manufactures non-porous membranes for the construction industry; Printing Technology, in Mt. Pleasant, which recycles and re-manufactures ink cartridges; and Integrity Nutraceuticals International, a Florida-based, global raw material supplier of bulk nutraceutical ingredients for products supporting healthy lifestyle and personal well-being.

Sekisui Plastics, a Japanese company, recently held their grand opening ceremony at their first site in the United States—in Mt. Pleasant—where their plant will produce a hybrid, moldable resin for the automotive, appliance and electronic industries.

New businesses stimulate economic development on the office, industrial and residential real estate fronts. "I did a presentation for the NAOIP (Nashville Association



foreseeable future,” Tamberrino says.

Tamberrino acknowledges that while the outlook is exciting, it also gives county leaders and business planners pause. “It makes you think,” he says. “Are we prepared for what’s coming our way? We know what to expect—all the pluses and minuses—but people in Maury County are not used to sitting at a stoplight! We’re excited about the restaurants, retail and recreation opportunities, though, so it’s a trade-off.”

“As a community, we have to balance new growth and expansion with the inevitable changes,” Tamberrino says. “And we’re in a good position to do that. It goes back to leadership, too—planning for development such as what is happening in Columbia—it has to be controlled growth.

“Columbia has close to 40,000 people now—so a number of restaurants and retail businesses are looking at us now. They’re counting rooftops—and future rooftops—as an indicator of our growth. But it’s important to remember that we need to approach our growth from the position of balance, so as not to lose the flavor of our community and our county.

“Economic development is not growth and new jobs at any cost.” Tamberrino says. “If we don’t preserve our quality of life—and our historic assets—our growth will come at a high price.”

“It’s history that brought me to Maury County,” Alton Kelley says. Kelley, a native Nashvillian, has been with Middle Tennessee Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) since its inception 16 years ago. “I knew that all the old homes in the area could be marketed to the public. Our asset is our history—the preservation, promotion and marketing of our history. We have as many listings on the National Register—over 300—as any other county in the state.”

Maury County has four historic



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homes that are open daily to the public: Rippavilla Plantation in Spring Hill, Elm Springs in Columbia, the President James K. Polk Home in Columbia, and The Atheneum in Columbia.

Other historic homes are open to groups of 20 or more with a reservation, and there are two Polk plantations, Rattle and Snap and Hamilton Place, both in Mt. Pleasant.



Zion Church

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“Tourism in Maury County is a \$74 million industry,” Kelley says, “and it has been growing at a steady rate of 10% a year. The CVB started off as one cubicle in a shared office with the Chamber. Now it is a stand-alone agency for the county with five employees—we’re the largest non-Metro, non-resort CVB in the state, which is something considering that Maury is a semi-rural county. We’re the largest of our kind in the state and continuing to grow.”

“We’re doing the New South-Old South thing here in Maury County,” Kelley says, “and we’re doing it well. The Saturn Plant draws approximately 150,000 people on tours per year, and across the street is Rippavilla Plantation with its own tours and its famous corn maze. And we have the Tennessee Farm Life Museum at Rippavilla, as well.”

The town square, in Columbia, the county seat of Maury county, is one of the most beautiful and preserved squares in the state and a vital part of the community. “We’ve undergone a \$5.8 million greenway program, from the Court House steps to the Duck River,” Kelley says. “We’ve also built a \$3 million ‘Garden Street’ along Highway 31 to the Duck River Bridge, an improvement project that put the utilities underground, provided for historic lighting, brick sidewalks and lots of green space.”

“Projects like this give the town a cohesive look, making it a magnet for filming. We’ve had three movies filmed here in the last two years.”

“In recent years, Maury County has branched out into some new and exciting tourism opportunities,” Kelley says. “In addition to historic homes, another tourism draw is agritourism, which is mainly international in scope. We offer a variety of farm-related tours, providing people from outside the United States opportunities

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to come and see how we do agriculture, dairy and wine-growing. We have two wineries, both producing now: Keg Springs Winery, and an as-yet-unnamed vineyard.”

A new development is eco-tourism, which is also growing in Maury County. “We are creating a blue way—a nationally recognized canoe trail on the Duck

River that should be up and running this spring. It will be a family-oriented canoe trail. And Still House Hollow Waterfalls, a state natural area with a pristine waterfall, was, just months ago, preserved as a park.”

Columbia was the site of what was to be a large TVA lake at one time, but after the dam was complete, an endangered species issue caused the demolition of the dam. The area that remained after the dam was destroyed was 13 acres of beautiful lands now open to the public—the Yanahli Lands. Yanahli is a Chickasaw word that means “open lands.” It is managed by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency as a wildlife resource area.

The county also has a series of bike trails for mountain bikes at Chickasaw State Park—and three major mountain bike races per year there.

Maury County’s population, which hovers at approximately 77,000 people, swells at various times of the year when special events draw tourists from all over the world. Mule Day is one such event.

“Mule Day, with its traditional home-spun events, gets bigger, better and longer each year,” Kelley says. “Up to 200,000 people show up for Mule Day events each year. The Mule Day parade is a big draw, and the Maury County Park is a central gathering point. People come into town several days in advance from all over the world for Mule Day. It’s both an economic and social event.”

“We also have antebellum homes and the annual Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities (APTA) Home Tour, and the Majestic Christmas Home Tour.” There are usually ten homes on the tour—some of which people continue to live in, too. Volunteers conduct the tours. These involve Mt. Pleasant, and the unincorporated communities of Santa Fe and Water Valley.

History provides another new opportunity for growth in Maury County.

“We’ve partnered with the state as we plan for the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War,” Kelley says. “Only the state of Virginia had more battles than the state of Tennessee during the Civil War. The state is implementing a network of trails related to the Civil War. ‘Hood’s Advance to Nashville’ will wind through Giles, Maury,

Williamson and Davidson counties. This will be one of the first of the state's pilot trails and will serve as a template for the other trails to be designed and built."

The hospitality industry is due to grow in Maury County, as tourism continues to grow. And with that growth comes the need for more accommodations for visitors.

"At this time, we have 800 rooms available in the county," Kelley says. "We're in talks with the county commissioner now, researching the feasibility of a conference center—ideally a 20,000-square-foot facility with a 150 to 200-room hotel adjoining



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAURY ALLIANCE

it. The County Commission is going to vote, with the city of Columbia, on jointly funding a feasibility study on the possible size of both of these facilities. There's a need to educate the community about the necessity for such a thing."

Education has a long pedigree in Maury County. Columbia State Community College (CSCC) was the first community college established in the state of Tennessee, and it is celebrating its 40th anniversary with approximately 500 students.

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Duck River



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Trolley Tour



“Along with Columbia State, Maury County is also the headquarters of the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation, Maury Regional Hospital with its medical staff of 165 physicians, General Motors in Spring Hill, and a good mix of smaller companies. These assets, combined with our history, charm and quality of life, make Maury County an excellent place to live and work.”

—WAYMON L. HICKMAN

“Maury County’s public school system recently became one of the first five school systems in the state of Tennessee to be recognized by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACSCASI).

“Along with Columbia State, Maury County is also the headquarters of the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation, Maury Regional Hospital with its medical staff of 165 physicians, General Motors in Spring Hill, and a good mix of smaller companies. These assets, combined with our history, charm and quality of life, make Maury County an excellent place to live and work,” Hickman says with pride.

Alton Kelley agrees. “If you were an investor, I can’t think of a better place to be than Columbia and Maury County, to buy and expect a sizeable return.” **tn**

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