



EMBRACING CHANGE—DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING NEW PLANS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS





Pigg School House

Change is inevitable. Times change, politicians change, industries come and go, and natural resources are depleted or discovered—and with that inevitable evolution, the economic climate of a county changes, too. Embracing change—and developing and implementing new plans for future success—is hard work, especially in a region where the past continues to play an integral role in the present.

Located in the heart of Middle Tennessee and home to the communities of Columbia, Mt. Pleasant and Spring Hill, Maury County is in the midst of some major transitioning. Maury County’s leaders are well aware of the effects of

low-cost labor. “Maury County experienced a double blow,” Tamberrino says. “Even our traditional manufacturing concerns disappeared as we experienced the shift of traditional Southern manufacturing to offshore or overseas. The unemployment rate jumped into the 20s.”

About that time, General Motors was conducting a search for a plant location to build its new Saturn concept. Waymon L. Hickman has been credited as the man who helped bring the Saturn plant to Maury County, an event that not only revitalized the area’s economy but made national news. Hickman, at the time a banker and the chairman of the economic development arm of the Chamber of Commerce, was serving—at the request of then-governor Lamar Alexander—as a liaison between the State of Tennessee and General Motors. His responsibilities as liaison included hammering out the arrangements that would pave the way for General Motors to settle in Tennessee.

time and change on their economy, and good planning is at the forefront of everyone’s minds. “How do you plan where and what type of growth you want? It sounds simple but it isn’t easy,” Frank Tamberrino says.

Tamberrino, president of the Maury Alliance, the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Center for the county, has witnessed a lot of changes in Maury County throughout his tenure. “Our community has been around for over 200 years. So we have the old ways of thinking and new people with new ideas mixing it up,” he says. “It’s not so much that folks are butting heads, but that the dichotomy is more evident when you’re trying to generate a consensus on where, as a community, we are heading.”

Maury County has evolved through a couple of major transitions in its long history. In its early years, from the first settlers who arrived in 1806, Maury was a farming and mercantile community due to its strategic position along an early major trade route—the Natchez Trace—a path originally beaten down by Native Americans and followed by French traders and colonial pioneers.

In the late 1890s, Judge S.O. Weatherly discovered a site containing high-grade brown phosphate rock near Mt. Pleasant—a mineral discovery that proved pivotal to the county and the state of Tennessee. Mining and industry moved into the area. By 1900, there were 15 companies in operation and the population of Mt. Pleasant had increased 300% in just a few short years. Maury County made its first major transition from an agrarian community to a manufacturing community with the mining and extraction of phosphate, along with numerous “cut and sew” operations.

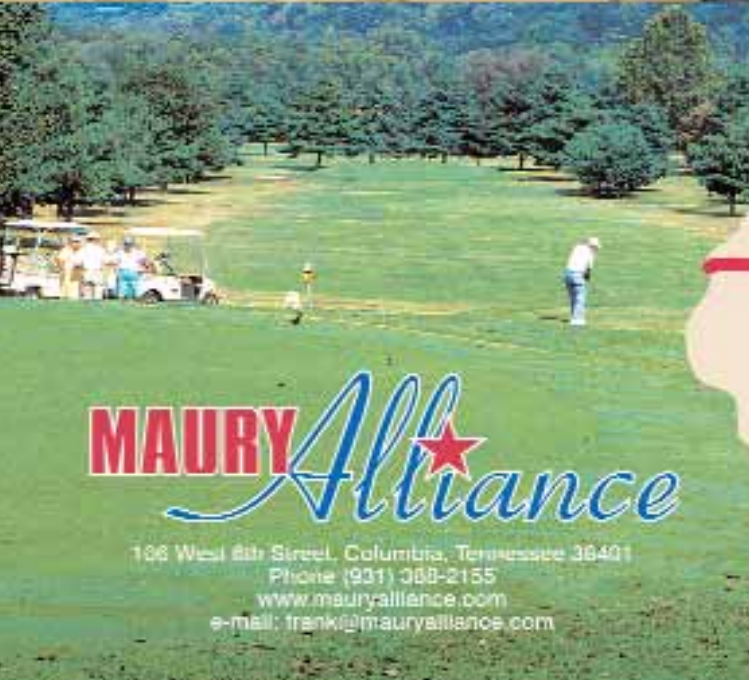
Fast forward almost 100 years, and the phosphate, while still available, was no longer profitable to mine and extract. With Florida and some western states able to process the phosphate far more competitively, the phosphate industry in Maury County, for all intents and purposes, disappeared. Textile manufacturers and low-end assembly plants went away, too, as the products of traditional manufacturing concerns followed



(left to right) are Frank Tamberrino; Bob McCormick, director of operation, ABNote/Arthur Blank & Co.; Doug Venable, CEO of Porter-Walker; Ron Hanson, manager - human resources, Cytec Industries; Gov. Bredesen; Mark Morgan, plant manager, W.R Grace Co.

With the opening of the Spring Hill Saturn plant, Maury County was transformed into a more modern manufacturing economy, bringing in the auto industry, suppliers, support services, fabricators, office products and services. “General Motors chose Maury County for many reasons,” Hickman says, “including location, work ethic, state government and other factors.” GM’s arrival came at the right time and shifted the county

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from its dependence on a declining manufacturing and mining sectors to a dependence on the auto industry and higher-end manufacturing.

General Motors is now changing the landscape of Maury County again—literally. The company is selling 500+ acres of its property located across the street from the plant. Assuming that it will be zoned for mixed use, the property is being marketed by Jones Lang LaSalle, a national commercial real estate firm. There has been interest from all over North America focused on Spring Hill and that acreage, according to Tamberrino. Approximately 100 acres will be donated to Rippavilla Inc.; several acres on the north side have been slated for public use for a school or conference center; 50 acres have been designated for commercial use. On the south side, acreage is available for office or civic use; multi-family housing; and single family residential housing.

General Motors is changing the economics of Maury County again, too, with its recent cessation of automotive production. In March 2007, the plant produced its last Saturn Vue and Saturn Ion, and issued layoffs to close to 2,400 employees. “Our unemployment rate jumped from 5.4% to 9.4% over six months, but it’s just temporary,” Tamberrino says.

The company is retooling the entire plant—a \$225 million overhaul—with the machinery, new paint booth system and ventilation necessary to manufacture a new crossover vehicle. In addition, General Motors will be spending another \$400 million to \$600 million from a construction standpoint. As the company brings in new equipment and contractors, GM employees will go back on the payroll as they assist in placement of equipment. And, Tamberrino says, there is a light at the end of the tunnel for the employees of the suppliers. “When GM gears up for the new product, scheduled for fall of 2008, they’ll need the suppliers back, with their approximately 900 employees. This will take us right back to where we were six months ago.”

The short-term effect of the plant

closing gave the Maury County powers-that-be pause—and some impetus to fast-forward their vision-making. “But, for the long-term, no one is panicking, because we see this as temporary,” Tamberrino says. And the years of effort that have gone into making sure the plant and the state have stayed competitive have paid off, as the Spring Hill plant has stayed off the closing list over the years.

In 2006, Maury County had an extremely good year attracting jobs and industry with the announcement of the addition of more than 1,000 jobs, and close to a million square feet of real estate that was built or absorbed. Maury County was one of only two counties in 2006 that announced more than 1,000 jobs added. (Davidson was the other.) New companies that moved into the area include Auto2Auto.com (Internet auto sales); Al’s Garden Art, a manufacturing plant for high-end concrete products out of California; W.R. Grace Performance Chemicals, a manufacturer of non-porous membranes for the construction industry; Printing Technology, a recycler and remanufacturer of ink cartridges; and Sekisui Plastics, a Japanese company that produces a hybrid, moldable resin for the automotive, appliance and electronic industries.

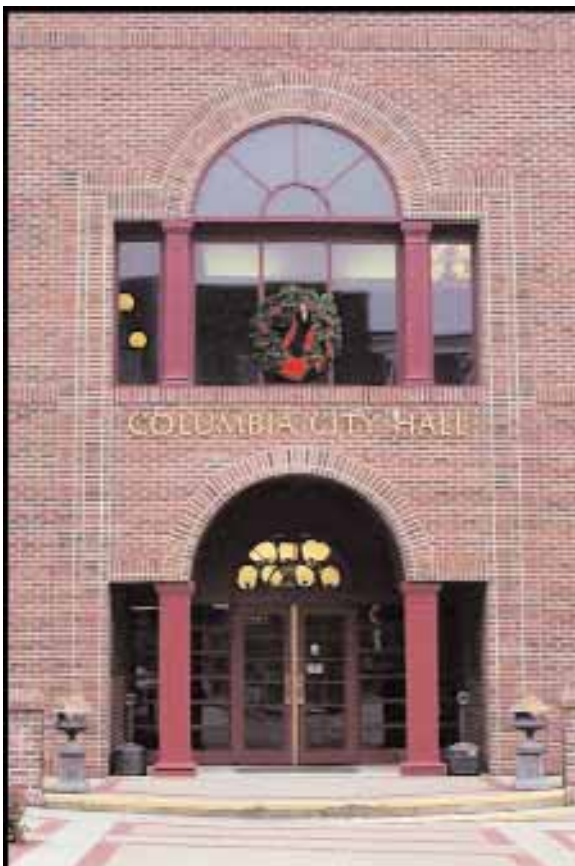
People from all over the country—and especially those from Florida, it seems—are looking for a small-town lifestyle, that is close to a metropolitan area such as Nashville. Maury County’s proximity to Nashville in Davidson County, and to Franklin in Williamson County, is quite an asset. Companies looking for a



good workforce, ease of transportation (I-65 cuts through the county, and I-840 lies just to the north), and promising economic opportunities see Maury County as a great mix of old and new, big and small, busy and relaxed.

Two companies from Florida, Integrity Nutraceuticals International and Kitty Hawk Furniture, moved into the county this past month. The owners of Integrity Nutraceuticals, a Florida-based, global raw material supplier of bulk nutraceutical ingredients for products supporting healthy lifestyles, started looking at Maury County due to escalating insurance costs in Florida and a need to attract affordable talent. The company chose Maury County and has opened both an office and manufacturing concern—a mini-pharmaceutical lab.

Kitty Hawk Furniture, a manufacturer and distributor of outdoor furniture, moved into a 50,000-square-foot building



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in Mt. Pleasant. “They have a big building because they have grand plans,” Tamberrino says.

Other new companies moving into the area include Pretty Products, which is locating in Mt. Pleasant and will bring in 200 jobs, and Johnson Controls, which is locating in Columbia and will bring in 300+ jobs.

With all of the new businesses opening or relocating to Maury County, there is a residual impact in that not many industrial or commercial buildings or space is available at this time. There has been some new construction, and a few office buildings are coming up on the market—two Class-A buildings. Anything new is 12 to 18 months out, Tamberrino says, but he points out that current economic goals include encouraging additional investment in the community, and identifying suitable property for long-term planning purposes for industrial, commercial and office space.

On the flip side, Tamberrino is happy to report that the housing industry is “growing like gangbusters, though we’ve slowed down some on issuing permits.” Lots and housing have been approved—four to five years worth of lots and building approvals—so building will happen, regardless of the market.

Change is on the governmental horizon in Maury County these days, too. New city council members have been seated, and by year’s end, the City Council will choose two new city managers for Mt. Pleasant and Spring Hill. Paul Boyer recently took over the city manager position for Columbia.

One thing that hasn’t changed in Maury County: the rich, preserved local history that brings many people to the area—tourists who spend money. The good folks at the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) are well aware of the county’s charms and use that knowledge as they plan for the future. Formerly the Middle Tennessee CVB, one of the first changes new executive director Brenda Pierce proposed upon taking office in March 2007 was a new name—one that more accurately reflects the mission and purpose of the CVB. The new Maury County Convention and Visitors Bureau was

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Trolley tour

One thing that hasn't changed in Maury County: the rich, preserved local history that brings many people to the area, tourists who spend money.

of 25 to 50 people, and the average is about 30 people. The usual itinerary is a visit to the Polk Home and the Atheneum, a ride and tour on the mule-drawn trolley that goes through historic downtown Columbia, a visit to Elm Springs or Rippavilla, with a plantation meal similar to what you would have experi-

born, and with it, a new plan for increasing tourism.

"I've been with the CVB for five years, working as the assistant director with a focus on marketing," Pierce says. "When I took the position as executive director, I brought the lion's share of the marketing responsibilities with me." Corinne Wells joined the CVB in April as the group tour coordinator and assistant director—Wells has hotel sales, and CVB experience, and experience working with groups and group tours. Approximately 90% of Wells' time, according to Pierce, is concentrated on group tours. This is a shift in emphasis from the past, when time was equally divided between planning and implementing small events and booking group tours.

"The seeds we've sewn this year will blossom next year," Pierce says, "But in 2007, we have already done 40% more tours than we did in 2006."

The tours mostly travel to the historic sites in Maury County, of which there are plenty. Maury County—and, in particular, Columbia—is often called the "Antebellum Homes Capital of Tennessee." There are five public sites, and four are open daily: the James K. Polk Home, Rippavilla Plantation, the Atheneum, and Elm Springs Plantation. Ferguson Hall at Spring Hill is open by appointment only, but they will accommodate groups. "The folks at Ferguson Hall really entertain the visitors with a story of a Confederate general who was murdered in that house," Pierce says, "and Elm Springs is also open for research."

The typical group tour is comprised

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enced in the 1850s, then on to Ferguson Hall for a tour and dessert. The Tennessee Museum of Early Farm Life is located behind Rippavilla Plantation, and in Santa Fe, groups can visit the restored Pigg School House, a one-room school house built in 1886.

The James K. Polk Home, the ancestral home where the eleventh president grew up, is in Columbia. "It is the only residence where President Polk lived, other than the White House, that is still standing," Pierce says, "and it is always a destination of tourists in Maury County."

Toward Mt. Pleasant are the other Polk Homes, built by President Polk's cousins. When Polk's uncle won the 5,000+ acre tract in a game of "Rattle and Snap" with the governor of North Carolina, who had acquired the land as part of the Revolutionary War Land Grant, General Polk divided it between his four sons. Each then had a plantation of about 1200 acres. One son named his Rattle and Snap (in honor of the game); one built Hamilton Place; another built Ashwood Hall; and another plantation was built that has since disappeared. Where the four properties intersected, the brothers built St. John's Church, an Episcopal church that served the four plantations. Rattle and Snap and Hamilton Place are still standing. They are privately owned, but will open for tours. Ashwood Hall burned down many years ago.

"We're still organizing festivals," Pierce says, "partnering with the Downtown Business and Professional Association, who've put on festivals for 12 years." The Southern Fried Festival takes place the last weekend in September, with foods, arts and crafts, a kids' zone and carnival, an antique trunk sale, a scarecrow decorating contest, and live entertainment that has, in the last three years, included many recognized stars.

"This year, we came up with the idea of inviting the Red Hat Society ladies and had a Red Hat Ladies parade—there were over 100 women involved!" Pierce says. The largest sponsor of the Southern Fried Festival is J. R. Neal—JRN Inc.—the largest KFC

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franchiser in the world. Their corporate office is located in Columbia. For the hat decorating contests, the Red Hat Ladies used KFC buckets.

The APTA Christmas Home Tour, the first weekend in December, draws visitors from all across the United States. The 15 sites include homes open for tours, private homes, churches and a bed and breakfast. And every year in April, the county hosts its famous Mule Day, a weekend of fun and celebration.

Tourism in Maury County isn't just a fascinating view into the past—it is big business. In September 2007, it was announced during the Governor's Conference on Tourism that Maury County saw expenditures of \$84 million from tourism in 2006, a 7.2% increase over tourism expenditures in 2005. "We have so much to offer," Pierce says, "and with our new vision and focus, more people than ever will be attracted to Maury County as a prime destination spot."

There have been attempts in the past to get the community to agree upon and create a vision for the future, and Tamberrino believes that things are falling into place now in a satisfying way. "The county has allotted \$100,000 to hire a consultant to start that comprehensive planning process."

By the first of the year, the consultant will be on board and likely within a year, the consultant will have generated a report for the community.

In 1998, the State of Tennessee enacted a new law, S.B. 3278, Public Chapter 1101, requiring each county to establish a coordinating committee to develop its county growth. The new law includes many "smart growth" themes, including urban growth boundaries and planned growth areas. "We now need more than just zoning," Tamberrino says. "Zoning is only one component. Citizens, developers, and leaders in industry, business, education, and public infrastructure—all play a part. It's important for Maury County, but we need to get everyone on the same page."

Even as Maury County continues to enchant visitors with its Old South roots, change is happening. And the county's leaders and citizens are embracing that change as they plan for an invigorated future. **tn**