

BY CANDACE MOONSHOWER

A Very Good Trade

A “globescraper” is erected in Tennessee



Dr. Piero Picardi (left), WTCA boardmember and committee chair, and Tri-Cities WTC Executive Director Tim Siglan

On Dec. 18, 2006, there was a celebration to commemorate the opening of a building to house the World Trade Center—but the building is not a skyscraper, and it’s not in New York City. It’s in the Tri-Cities region of East Tennessee. The Tri-Cities Economic Development Alliance, a 10-county regional economic development corporation in Tennessee and Virginia, owns a World Trade Center (WTC) license, and Tim Siglan, its vice-president of trade, technology and entrepreneurship, recently came on board full time as executive director of MountainSouth World Trade Center.

As part of 300 WTC affiliates across the globe, only 70 of which are located in the United States, the Tri-Cities is poised to become a premiere inland port, foreign trade zone and air cargo facility, enabling foreign trade partners to ship

directly inland by air cargo jets to the Tri-Cities—a region located at the geographic center of the eastern United States. Jerry Petzholdt, an owner of TCI Group, the largest commercial industrial real estate company in the Tri-Cities region, has been instrumental in the startup of the WTC initiative. “Through the WTC initiative, the Tri-Cities can expand into the global market both on the import and export side, bringing growth, revenue, jobs and success to the region and our state as a whole,” Petzholdt says.

In October 2004, Petzholdt and a group of area movers and shakers traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to request the option for the license, presenting a case for why a non-metropolitanized area should be awarded the option for a license.

It was a strong case—a year later, the full license for a WTC initiative was awarded to the group at a meeting in Shanghai, China. The Economic Development Alliance was formed to hold the license. After three months of training in Switzerland, Tim Siglan returned to the United States in September 2006, to assume his position as executive director, and the process to build out the

WTC services began in earnest.

Service Provider

There are several services that a WTC provides, including **trade information**, **trade services**, **trade education** and **trade missions**. Trade information offers opportunities for businesses in the area to gather and share information with businesses in other parts of the world. The WTC initiative provides overseas businesses with partners from Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia to Western Kentucky. It also serves as an information clearinghouse—if businesses need to get in touch with the proper group to help with logistics, commerce or business development, the WTC helps find the right partner for their needs.

With **trade services**, the WTC offers to help a local com-

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pany go through the process of linking up with a company overseas and, more specifically, helps that company add jobs on the local level. "That's the value," Siglan says. "With the Economic Development Alliance as the parent company, our goal is to develop jobs locally." An example of trade services in action, Siglan says, would be a company that has ramped up production of a product in the United States but has an overseas branch producing a product at a lower price point. That product still needs to come into the United States, and someone has to unpack it and repackage it for distribution in smaller shipments here.

"Through the WTC initiative, the Tri-Cities can expand into the global market both on the import and export side, bringing growth, revenue, jobs and success to the region and our state as a whole." —JERRY PETZOLDT
TCI GROUP

Trade education is a service that provides information on how to do business with a company overseas, including what to expect when exporting a product overseas.

The power of the global connections provided by the WTC is evident with trade missions. "Not only will we show you how to do business," Siglan says, "but we'll take a select group of people or companies to a foreign country and facilitate meetings through our ties with WTCs in other countries, introducing them to potential business partners." Siglan says that the WTC in the Tri-Cities area will also host incoming missions, as well. "Even before our building was open, we had a delegation from Honduras here," Siglan says, "which

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shows what the WTC can do for the Tri-Cities area.”

The WTC is partnering with an alliance of business incubators across the region to provide provisional office space to companies that might want to come to the United States and examine and study the market. Overseas companies can use the incubators to set up shop temporarily.

“Our region has a big footprint—it encompasses a 75-mile radius from the Tri-Cities Airport—and we want to roll out the virtual welcome mat in all the locations across that footprint,” Siglan says. “Each of the incubators has a different specialty, including biotech, high-tech and light manufacturing, in addition to a few general purpose incubators. A business can choose our region for its geography and for our incubators, which will serve as advisors and potential partners.”

“The Tri-Cities may never have a



In October 2006, the Tri-Cities WTC hosted its first visiting trade delegation, from the city of Siguatepeque, Honduras.

skyscraper,” Siglan says, “but we’re looking at the WTC initiative in the Tri-Cities as positive economic development as opposed to real estate development, which half of the 300 WTC initiatives do concentrate on.”

With the recognition as a major player in trade that comes from association with the World Trade Center, the Tri-Cities doesn’t need a skyscraper. **tn**

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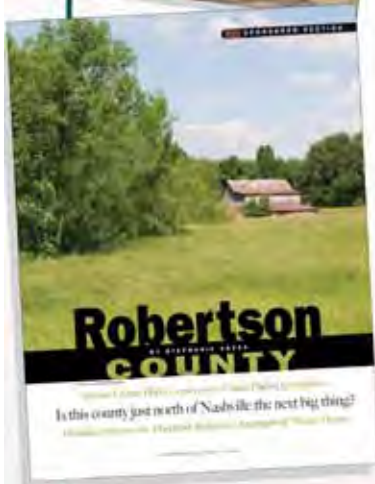
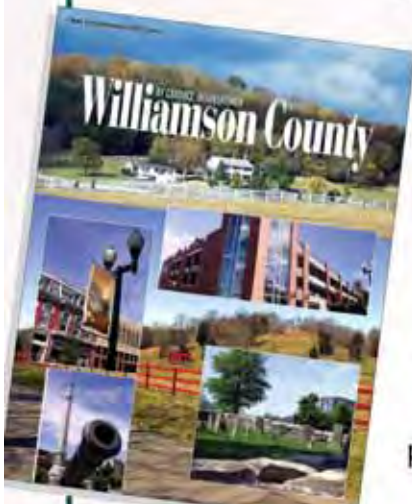
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