

BY CANDACE MOONSHOWER

Summer County

HIDDEN TREASURES





FLW Tournament on Old Hickory Lake

Someone who is in the business of luring folks into an area often has a bird's eye view of its assets and happenings. That's true of Kaye Ireland, executive director of the Sumner County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). "What's going on in Sumner County?" Ireland asks. "Everything!" Ireland describes Sumner County, 500 square miles of rolling Tennessee hills just 40 miles north of Nashville, as a county of hidden treasures that include historic sites, abundant recreational opportunities and new development in the residential, retail and industrial sectors.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUMNER COUNTY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

Ireland, charged with leading the CVB's efforts to market tourism in Sumner County, says that while improved infrastructure can only help bring visitors into the area, statistics show that approximately 81% of visitors to Sumner County already travel there as a primary destination. "When people research Sumner on the Internet, they see we have a variety of things to do here," she says. "There are hotel choices and recreation opportunities here in Sumner and, of course, we're close to Nashville and all that Nashville has to offer." Snowbirds traveling to and from Florida stop in Sumner County, too. "Market research in 2006 showed that 75% of people who visited us say that they plan to come back," Ireland says.

"We're ranked eighteenth among the Tennessee counties in economic expenditures by visitors," Ireland says. According to the most recent data available from the Travel Industry of America, that equates to \$79 million in travel-related expenditures in Sumner County in 2005, an 8.9% increase over similar expenditures in 2004. That translates to local sales tax of almost \$2 million that go directly into the county coffers.

Old Hickory Lake, 22,500 acres of water, is an important asset to the county, Ireland says,

both for the residents and the tourists. "We sponsor a lot of fishing tournaments—the Walmart FLW, Everstart, Bassmaster Megabucks, BASS Tennessee Eastern Invitational, Super Bass Classic National Championship and Bass Pro Shops Crappiemasters National Championship among others," Ireland says. In 2007, the county will host the American Bass Anglers Couples Championship. The tournaments are mostly national championships that garner substantial publicity. Larger tournaments can have as much as a \$3.2 million economic impact during the week they take place.

"We also promote sports marketing with each city's parks departments to sponsor baseball, softball and soccer tournaments," Ireland says. "These sports tournaments fill hotel rooms and restaurants for weeks at a time with a huge economic impact on the county."

While the main tourist attraction in the county is Old Hickory Lake, Ireland points to the nine historic homes available for tours as another reason Sumner is becoming a "destination" for visitors. "These homes predate the Civil War. They've been restored and are open to the public to enjoy," Ireland says. "Many special events are held at these sites, including the Holiday Heritage Tour of Homes in December."



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Sumner County is a prime destination for group tours. “We market a lot of packages in that way—folks who want to stay in Sumner and also go into Nashville to see and do things,” Ireland says.

A Tennessee native who has lived in Sumner County for 27 years, Ireland has watched her county grow and develop rapidly in recent years. She is pleased that developers are work-

has been key to Sumner County’s ability to maintain its status as a vibrant bedroom community to Nashville. But the county is enjoying an influx of businesses and industries that are providing opportunities for county residents to live and work there, too. Jobs, which keep people from spending their money elsewhere during the workaday, give people a reason to stay home to work as well as play.

These days, the rural beauty and small-town atmosphere of Sumner County, combined with the increased need for homes and businesses, has made the area ripe for the new “lifestyle communities,” part of the trend in new urbanization—housing that encourages social interaction and a return to community spirit.

—R.J. “HANK” THOMPSON

ing with county and city executives to maintain Sumner’s quality of life. “Developers are respecting the scenic beauty we’ve always been known for,” Ireland says, “and visitors tell us that they’re happy to see we still have that here.”

Growth—controlled and planned growth—

“You cannot keep growth from happening,” says R.J. “Hank” Thompson, who is serving his second term as the county executive of Sumner County. “If you stop growth, you wither on the vine.”

Sumner County could have easily withered



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The company made a bold move in early 2006 by moving its American corporate headquarters from southern California to Gallatin, Tennessee in Sumner County near Nashville. After a year in temporary offices, Samick moved into its new headquarters – a recently-completed 14,000 square foot Adams Federal Colonial style building. The new complex also includes a 200,000 square foot warehouse that will serve as the primary distribution center for all Samick products. It will also eventually be used for manufacturing for pianos and guitars.

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on the vine after the tornado of April 2006. A "supercell," spawned from a major tornado outbreak on April 6, devastated a 25-mile area of the county, resulting in the loss of nine lives, the destruction of approximately 1,500 homes and \$400 million in damage. With infrastructure one of the biggest obstacles impeding growth in recent years, the destruction from

the tornadoes could have proven intimidating for county and city officials. Instead, reconstruction began immediately, and 15 months later, infrastructure and road improvements are underway and on schedule.

State Route 386, Vietnam Veterans Boulevard, opened two newly completed sections in June 2007, providing a direct link from

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Interstate 65 to Highway 109 in Gallatin. The completion of this extension of the highway will allow Sumner, located between I-40 and I-65, to accommodate the expansive growth there, as well as provide better access for tourists into the county.

Like Ireland, Thompson, a Tennessee native who has lived in Sumner County since 1965, has also seen a lot of changes. "I've watched Hendersonville grow from a small burg with a Dairy Queen to a city of 50,000 people," he says. The other seven incorporated cities and towns that make up Sumner include Gallatin, Hendersonville, Goodlettsville, Millersville, Portland, Westmoreland, White House and Mitchellville. Growth and change is happening all over the county, although the county seat of Gallatin, along with Hendersonville, are seeing the bulk of the development.

In 1765, Henry Skaggs and the Bledsoe brothers explored the area around Bledsoe's Lick in Castalian Springs, and established a temporary camp where the current Bledsoe Fort Historical Park is located. Mansker's Station was explored by Kasper Mansker, who settled the Goodlettsville area in 1779. These days, the rural beauty and small-town atmosphere of Sumner County, combined with the increased need for homes and businesses, has made the area ripe for the new "lifestyle communities," part of the trend in new urbanization—housing that encourages social interaction and a return to community spirit.

In Hendersonville, Ernst Constructors are building Indian Lake Village, "a near-perfect balance of commerce, convenience, residence and recreation," as they describe it. Within Indian Lake Village, residents will be able to live, work, shop and relax within easy walking distance of office space, high-end retail stores, restaurants, a hotel and entertainment opportunities. The homes in Indian Lake Village will be high-quality garden homes, and the community will be bordered by nearby Old Hickory Lake. Indian Ridge

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Village is projected to open in the fall of 2007. “People are discovering a quality of life in Sumner County,” says Steve Gregory, the current chairman of the Forward Sumner Economic Council and an executive vice president at Volunteer State Bank. “We’re developing a community where people can live, play and work, so the dynamics are really changing.” Indicative of those changes are the active partnerships between business and government in the county, an exchange of information that helps foster harmony. “Our government officials have good business sense,” Gregory says,

“and there is probably as good a climate here for business as we’ve ever had.”

The Forward Sumner Economic Council has as its goal the strength and balance of a diverse community with one vision, and that vision is to identify, coordinate and achieve the shared economic and community development goals and priorities of both public and private organizations throughout the county. With the population of Sumner growing at twice the rate of that of the state of Tennessee as a whole, countywide economic development efforts are fostering teamwork and cohesive-

PHOTO COURTESY OF FORWARD SUMNER ECONOMIC COUNCIL

WELCOME TO THE LIFESTYLE OF THE FUTURE IN SUMNER COUNTY

Inspired by the charm of traditional main street design, Indian Lake Village will soon feature a one-of-a-kind community environment where living, working, shopping and playing are all within walking distance in a single, delightful local development. Bordered by the beauty of nearby Old Hickory Lake in Hendersonville, Indian Lake Village will be home to over 1,000 discriminating homes, nearly 2.5 million square feet of Class A office space, 1.5 million square feet of high-end retail shops and restaurants, a health and fitness center, multiplex cinema, playground, lake trails and much more. Everything for life.

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ness between the municipalities.

There is a diverse array of business in the county—or in the process of relocating there—including manufacturing, distribution, health care, warehousing, corporate and regional headquarters and schooling. With plenty of acreage still available, Portland, Gallatin and Westmoreland are suited for continuing growth in the manufacturing sector. In Hendersonville, there are plans to build up to two million square feet of office space at Indian Lake. The Memorial Foundation has built two high-end office buildings on Gallatin Road across from the Blue Grass Country Club.

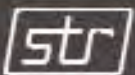
A few of the larger companies in Sumner County include Ernst Constructors, a residential contractor; The Access Group, consultants in the health care industry; Halo Properties, developers and managers of planned communities and the builders of Indian Lake Village in Hendersonville; and Smith Travel Research, the leading lodging industry data provider, which is expanding its operations in Hendersonville. The G.F. Puhl Co., a major manufacturer of trim and waste paper collection systems, moved to Gallatin in 2007. PIC International Group, a business devoted to the genetic improvement

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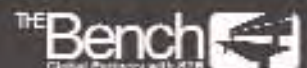


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“Industry is booming in Sumner County,” says Thompson. “There’s GAP Inc., in Gallatin, the second largest employer in the county; PK USA, a Japanese auto parts company, is located in a 62,000-square-foot facility in Gallatin’s industrial park; Yokohama M, a Japanese designer and manufacturer of welding systems and equipment for the automotive industry, is in Portland; there are manufacturers of electronic parts and boxes also in Portland; three storm window plants in Hendersonville; Beck & Beck, a large engineering firm, is building in Indian Lake; and the ServPro national headquarters is in Gallatin.”

Of continuing importance to the powers-that-be in Sumner is the public school system and post-high-school educational opportunities. “We have a great school system,” Thompson says with pride. “Recently, we had 13 different Wall Street banks bid on our bond for building nine new schools and renovating nine others—a \$125 million building program. That shows the kind of interest there is out there in what is going on in Sumner County.” The Sumner County Schools system is the largest single employer in the county.

In the private school sector, Davidson Academy, a private Christian school for grades pre-K through 12, is in the midst of moving its Nashville campus to a new site in Hendersonville. Pope John Paul II High School opened its doors in Hendersonville in 2002. Other private schools in Sumner County include College Heights Christian Academy, Hendersonville

Christian Academy, Highland Academy and Sumner Academy.

Volunteer State Community College is an asset to the county, too. Now the third largest public college in the state after the UT-Knoxville and Middle Tennessee State University, Volunteer State is a two-year community college serving a 12-county region. The college works in an active partnership with the business leaders in Sumner County to provide continuing education and training. In the spring of 2007, a new Tennessee Small Business Development Center, the fifteenth in the state, opened at the college. The Small Business Development Center will provide free assistance to businesses in the area to help them grow and develop in new ways, including one-on-one counseling and training for the startup of new businesses on topics from accounting to marketing.

Charles Alexander, director of the Tennessee Small Business Development Center at Volunteer State, has been pleased by the early success of the center. “I thought I’d be spending these first few months trying to get the

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KENSHO, INC



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Sumner Regional
Medical Center

word out, making my rounds and meeting people,” he says, “but we’ve been busy. As of July, we’ve serviced almost 50 clients and have had over 100 people attend different training workshops.” Alexander is proud of the fact that in just a few short months, the Center has assisted small businesses in acquiring over \$300,000 in loans or capital investments.

The new center is a project that grew out of a collaboration between local businesses and municipalities and The Campaign Task Force, made up of representatives from the college, the chambers of commerce within the county, the Forward Sumner Economic Council, and other economic development entities—all of whom worked to meet the \$50,000 goal needed to apply for the matching federal grant money through the Small Business Association.

Sumner Regional Medical Center, the third largest non-government employer in the state, is located in Gallatin. The hospital is in growth mode these days, too. From its original incarnation as a small area hospital with 50 employees and seven doctors, Sumner Regional now operates as a 145-bed facility with a 10-bed transitional care unit employing 1,000 people and close to 200 physicians. The medical center provides quality care in numerous areas, including cancer treatment, cardiac care, same-day surgery, orthopedics, diagnostics, women’s health and rehabilitation services.

While Sumner County grows, attracting business and industry and building new homes and commercial space, the priority of county leaders continues to be the preservation of Sumner’s scenic rural atmosphere and green space. One such project is at Station Camp Creek, where there are three schools on the campus. The county has closed the road there to build a two-mile walking and bicycle trail. New homes are under development. In the midst of the new building, an old log cabin was discovered, hiding under aluminum siding.

“Historians and archeologists went wild,” Thompson says. “It turned out to be the first Sumner County Courthouse, when Andrew Jackson was the district attorney for Davidson, Sumner and Tennessee counties.” The cabin will be restored and serve as the trail head for the walking and bicycle trail.

Another preservation project in progress is the restoration of a farm with three old barns and acres of green space. “We’re working with the Rogers Group to do the work, and they’ll lease it to the county for \$1 per year,” Thompson says.

“We want to grow in the right places and preserve our history, too,” Thompson says. “It’s happening. We’re proud of our great community. Sumner County is an exciting place to live these days.” **tn**