

Sunday, January 8, 2017

## On your mark!

**G**et set! Go! And we are off! We are beginning 2017 full of economic development optimism. We have been, and certainly are on a roll and our ball promises to pick up even more speed and keep rolling as the year progresses.

2016 is officially now a recent memory — a year of tremendous progress and accomplishment for your chamber, city, county and Highlands region. More about yesterday under separate cover. Let's get back to the now.

First: 12 days from today, we will be competing with Clarksville/Austin Peay State University to host the BlueCross Bowl, the Tennessee state

### Chamber Chatter



George Halford

high school football championships for the next four-year period (December 2017–December 2020). A whole lot is at stake. Cookeville's premier annual visitor event attracts approximately 42,000 fans from throughout the state each December to watch eight championship games over a three-day period. Oh, yes, did I mention that our visitors leave behind approximately \$3 million during their stay, and the event generates hand to quantity year round, marketing and awareness of our region and TTU since its inception eight years ago? These are game changers for us.

Simply put, we have an excellent team led by TTU Athletic Director, Mark Wilson, Cookeville Mayor Ricky Shelton, Putnam County Executive Randy Porter, chamber leadership and others. We have a great game plan and we will be playing and expecting to win. Stay tuned.

Switching gears (or should I say engines), economic development (industrial development) shows great promise as we are currently working with two prospects and several more suspects that are at different stages of their perspective search processes. We are extremely optimistic about both projects, but as the late, great, baseball legend and philosopher, Yogi Berra once so famously said "it ain't over 'til it's over." Amen.

The retail sector expects to diversify and officially expand this year with new-to-market retail, the crown jewel being The Shoppes at Eagle Point. Hopefully, procedural challenges will be finished by this month and construction will soon begin.

The 275,000 square-foot facility located at in the Walnut/Veterans Drive area across the street from the fairgrounds, will house the likes of Publix, Academy Sports + Outdoors, Ross, Ulta, Five Below, Marshalls, Panera Bread and many more quality stores which will expand our retail sales base and grow our economy.

Again, more and more, we want to give our citizens/visitors less and less reasons to leave our community for goods and services.

Visitors will be coming to town in record numbers this year with the highlight being (in addition to the BlueCross Bowl), the first in the nation regional H.O.G. Rally (Harley-Davidson Owners Group). Approximately 8,000-10,000 delegates from eight states and beyond, plus several foreign countries, will attend the regional rally in mid-July and leave millions of dollars behind for our use. It's bigger than big, folks. More info to come.

Oops. Running out of space. Next month I will continue by discussing the Highlands Economic Partnership (HEP) strategic marketing planning process, our Chamber annual meeting, progress on the new downtown convention center/hotel and lots more.

Let the good times roll.

George Halford is the president/CEO of the Cookeville-Putnam County Chamber of Commerce.

## Alpine Lodge sold

By LAURA MILITANA  
HERALD-CITIZEN Staff

The year 2016 ended with a sad note for one local hotel owner.

Martina Gabriel sold the Alpine Lodge after 37 years of ownership.

"It was originally a Howard Johnson motel," she recalled.

The year was 1979 and it was the first Howard Johnson hotel in the region.

Martina and her late husband, Josef, came from humble beginnings — he from Switzerland, she from Austria.

Josef was the oldest of seven children and had to drop out of school in the sixth grade to help support the family. He worked in the local grocery store, did odd jobs and helped on the farm.

An uncle loaned him funds to allow him to be an apprentice to a baker. By the time he was the age to graduate high school, he had become a pastry chef.

By the time he was 29, his debts were paid off and he was free to go to America. But he had to have a job first.

When he saw an ad in the newspaper for a pastry chef to do wedding cakes for a baker in Norwalk, Conn., he jumped on the



Ty Kernea | Herald-Citizen

Celebrating the sale of the Alpine Lodge, from left, are Anton Gabriel and Peter Gabriel, sons of Martina Gabriel, former owner; with new owners Chetan Patel, Miltesh Patel and Jigar Patel.

opportunity.

He arrived in America with \$6 in his pocket.

After working hard for two and a half years, he had saved enough for a down payment on a house. He then rented out the spare bedrooms, which is where his interest in the motel business came in.

It was due to the death of his father he met Martina, who was working in restaurants in Switzer-

land.

He offered Martina a job at his motel. She accepted.

In the next 10 years, they were able to buy another motel and a couple of houses on the waterfront.

By the late 1970s, the Gabriels sold the north-eastern properties and headed south. They came to Cookeville and started a family.

In 1998, Josef and Martina decided not to renew

their franchise with Howard Johnson and the motel was renamed The Alpine Lodge and Suites.

Josef passed away in 2015 and Martina has been looking to downsize for a while. She began looking at selling it in the spring of 2016.

"People came from all over the world," Martina recalled.

"It's bittersweet, but it was time."

## Ficosa adding on to new facility

By LAURA MILITANA  
HERALD-CITIZEN Staff

Ficosa's new plant only opened last year, but it's already experiencing growing pains.

The Spanish automotive company recently agreed to a design-build partnership with J&S Construction to provide design services and construction for a 4,800 square-foot addition to the new facility, which is currently the only industry in the Highlands Business Park.

The 270,000 square-foot manufacturing plant was unveiled to the public last October.

This addition will blend with the existing facility, matching the current elevations using a mixture of painted, split-face masonry and standard building siding.

The interior space will require the extension of crane rails and beams to accommodate the overhead crane that is in the current building.

At the floor level, there will be a series of trenches which will primarily allow the electrical requirements to be distributed as needed to the new equipment. New ventilation equipment will be installed in coordination with the requirements of the new die cast machines.

Construction will take place during normal working hours and will be done in such a way not to disrupt the ongoing operations of the facility.

Given the project scheduling restraints, the Design-Build process will allow construction to start much sooner than the alternative Design-Bid-Build method, allowing J&S Construction to meet the strict scheduling require-



The outside fenced-in break area is one of the many projects J&S Construction recently completed at the new Ficosa plant.



The inside break room gives employees a choice to stay and relax or enjoy the outside.

ments.

Other projects J&S Construction has recently completed for Ficosa North America's largest

and most technologically advanced U.S. facility include: modifications to the dock area to improve truck access; installation

of a new modular break room within the facility; and installation of a new fence at the outdoor break area.

**Tennessee  
TECH**

Partnered with local community and state to recruit approximately 2,500 new jobs in Putnam County.