

ANNUAL UPDATE *from* BOARD CHAIRMAN, BILL LEHNES



July, 2022 – As chairman of the Nash UNC Health Care Board of Commissioners, I'm pleased to share several updates and accomplishments our hospital has made this past year.

At Nash UNC, we have renewed our focus on improving the health and wellbeing of our community by providing high quality care and an exceptional patient experience. As part of our refocusing efforts, we identified four core values that center the entire organization: Trust in Compassion, Above & Beyond, Committed to Connections, and Service Leadership.

These core values drive our team to be successful, and others are taking notice. Business North Carolina named Nash UNC as one of the top 25 hospitals in NC, the only one in our region to make the list. We also received national recognitions for our heart, stroke, physical therapy, and maternity care, and remain an American Nurses Credentialing Center Pathway to Excellence Program. We also achieved reaccreditation from The Joint Commission (TJC), an important designation that reassures our community that the care we provide meets, and often exceeds, TJC's rigorous standards.

We recently announced compensation adjustments for 84% of our staff as part of the board's commitment to biannual market review to ensure we are offering competitive pay. We recruited top physicians to expand our general surgery and urology programs, and launched the Nash Development Institute to provide additional support, training, and development for our leaders.

We also developed new processes and programs to enhance our care offerings and improve the patient experience. The most cutting edge version of the da Vinci® Xi Surgical System was added to our robotic-assisted surgery program, and an Enhanced Recovery After Surgery program was implemented to help improve the patient's post-op recovery. Thanks to a new paramedic team nurse model, the emergency department can treat more patients with the assistance of paramedics, who work in conjunction with our physicians, nurses and other teammates. The laboratory also upgraded equipment with new tests that help diagnose medical events, such as heart attacks and sepsis, more quickly.

As part of our strategic plan, we developed and expanded several programs to improve the health of our patients beyond our four walls. Through the support of generous donors to the Nash UNC Health Care Foundation, we expanded our Community Paramedic Program and Inpatient Food Pantry to reduce unnecessary patient readmissions to the hospital. Our community paramedics follow-up with high-risk patients after hospitalization to make sure they have the resources and tools to stay healthy at home. The food pantry provides patients



struggling with food insecurity with disease-specific food boxes and community food resources upon discharge.

Nash UNC remains active in our community by providing COVID vaccines (both on-campus and via mobile clinics), offering health education, and giving back through hundreds of employee volunteer service hours. Our Employee Giving Campaign raised more than \$87,000 that will directly support the health and wellbeing of our community through our Foundation and the United Way Tar River Region.

Our achievements throughout the year resulted in a significant increase in our patient experience scores. We are proud of the strides we have made in this area, and thank our patients for providing feedback so that we can continue to improve.

As we look to the future, we are in the midst of a new strategic planning process that will guide our approach to ensuring we continue to meet the needs of our community for years to come. None of this would be possible without our compassionate and dedicated team working to improve the health of our entire community.

Sincerely,



Bill Lehnles,
Chairman of the Board of Commissioners,
Nash UNC Health Care



TWO SIDES OF THE SAME STORY

Nash and Edgecombe counties are writing a self-made tale. They already have completed the first chapters of a bright future by developing business opportunities and creating welcoming communities.

Rocky Mount is about an hour car ride east of Raleigh on U.S. 64, where the piedmont becomes the coastal plain. The city, where the U.S. Census counted almost 55,000 residents in 2020, is split by the Tar River and the county line shared by Edgecombe and Nash. Through its center runs a train track, which binds the sides like a closed zipper. “My office is in the Helen P. Gay train station,” says David Farris, president and CEO of Rocky Mount Area Chamber of Commerce. “The train comes through numerous times a day. That’s the sound of commerce, and it’s music to my ears.”

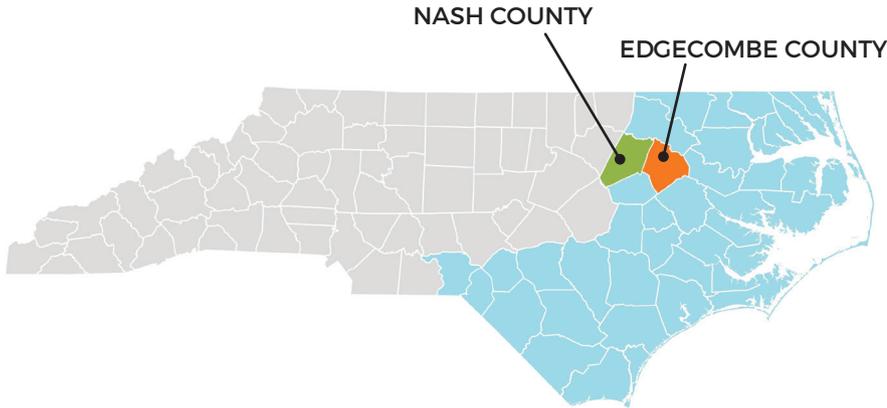
Amtrak uses the station’s main

building. It’s adjacent to the bus terminal used by Tar River Transit and Greyhound. Across from Farris’ office is home base for Carolinas Gateway Partnership, which promotes economic development in Rocky Mount and Edgecombe County. Nash County Economic Development markets its namesake county, including its county seat, Nashville. Both say that business recruitment is doing well. Tenants are occupying shell buildings. Big money is being invested. The sounds of commerce are becoming louder. But it hasn’t always been a happy tune.

The region’s economy recently

took two major blows. The first was television shopping network QVC’s 1.5-million-square-foot distribution center in Rocky Mount, which burned in December. Crews worked 10 days to contain what is the state’s largest structure fire. QVC announced it wasn’t rebuilding earlier this year, snuffing out 2,000 jobs in the process.

China-based Triangle Tyre, which committed to investing \$580 million and creating 800 jobs at the Kingsboro Business Park, a 1,500-acre site Carolinas Gateway Partnership had been marketing for nearly two decades, canceled its plans in May. Published reports



Edgecombe and Nash were branded Tier 1 — among the 40 most economically distressed — this year. Two years ago, Commerce labeled Edgecombe the state’s most economically distressed county for the fourth consecutive year. “[Edgecombe County has] high unemployment,” Tolson says. “But we are one of the most aggressive counties, and that’s important because you also have to close projects. [In mid-June], we were working 84 projects. And [Carolina Gateway Partnership Vice President Oppie Jordan] is getting one or two projects a week. The minute word got out that Triangle Tyre was leaving, we had eight people looking.”

say several issues refocused the manufacturer’s efforts on its business needs in China. “They couldn’t resolve the politics and neither could we,” says Carolina Gateway Partnership President and CEO Norris Tolson. “What we learned

was that the U.S. in that period of time lost \$45 billion in Chinese investment during the previous administration.”

N.C. Department of Commerce annually ranks the economic health of the state’s 100 counties.

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BUSINESS BOOM

Nash County Economic Development Director Andy Hagy has felt the winds of economic change the past two years. They blow in large part because of the COVID-19 pandemic. “We’re realizing that what is actually produced internationally and not here at home, that shift is coming, where even international companies — and we’ve just located two international companies — are realizing that if they’re going to do business with the U.S., they’re going to have to do their manufacturing here,” he says. “And U.S. companies are realizing that, too. Countries are realizing they have to make their products here, and we can’t risk losing that.”

South Korean pipe manufacturer

Cosmoind, for example, announced a \$12.8 million investment in May. It will build its first plant in North America and create 168 jobs at the Middlesex Corporate Centre in southern Nash County. “I think it was a combination of location [in landing Cosmoind], and they liked our presentation,” Hagy says. “We had a major communication problem — no one with them was fluent in English. So, we had a translator, and that helped bond our relationship. That comfort level was 100%.”

Companies are expanding elsewhere in Nash and Edgecombe counties. They include LS Tractor in Rocky Mount; LS Cable & System USA, a Korean company that’s investing \$27 million and adding 86 jobs to

its 188-person workforce in Tarboro; and Crump Group, a Canadian manufacturer of natural ingredient pet treats, which is investing \$13.2 million to establish its first U.S. factory in Nashville, creating 160 jobs in the process.

Raleigh-based food processor SinnovaTek was the first to set up shop at the Middlesex site. That was in April. The development has a 1-million-square-foot site ready for development. “We also have a 1-million-square-foot site under contract that a developer is going to build up, and that would be for distribution,” says Susan Phelps, Nash County’s economic development manager. “They’re in the due diligence phase. If you don’t have a



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The region is ready to go extra innings. The Tarboro Commerce Center near U.S. 64 and future Interstate 87, for example, has added a 65,000-square-foot shell building designed for manufacturing or warehousing. "There are a lot of different moving parts," Hagy says. "There's a backload from COVID-19 that are projects in delays. I think a lot of different industries now are worse than they were before COVID, but they are trying to get ahead of the game. We in Nash County are open for business, and you'll see that with the companies we're working

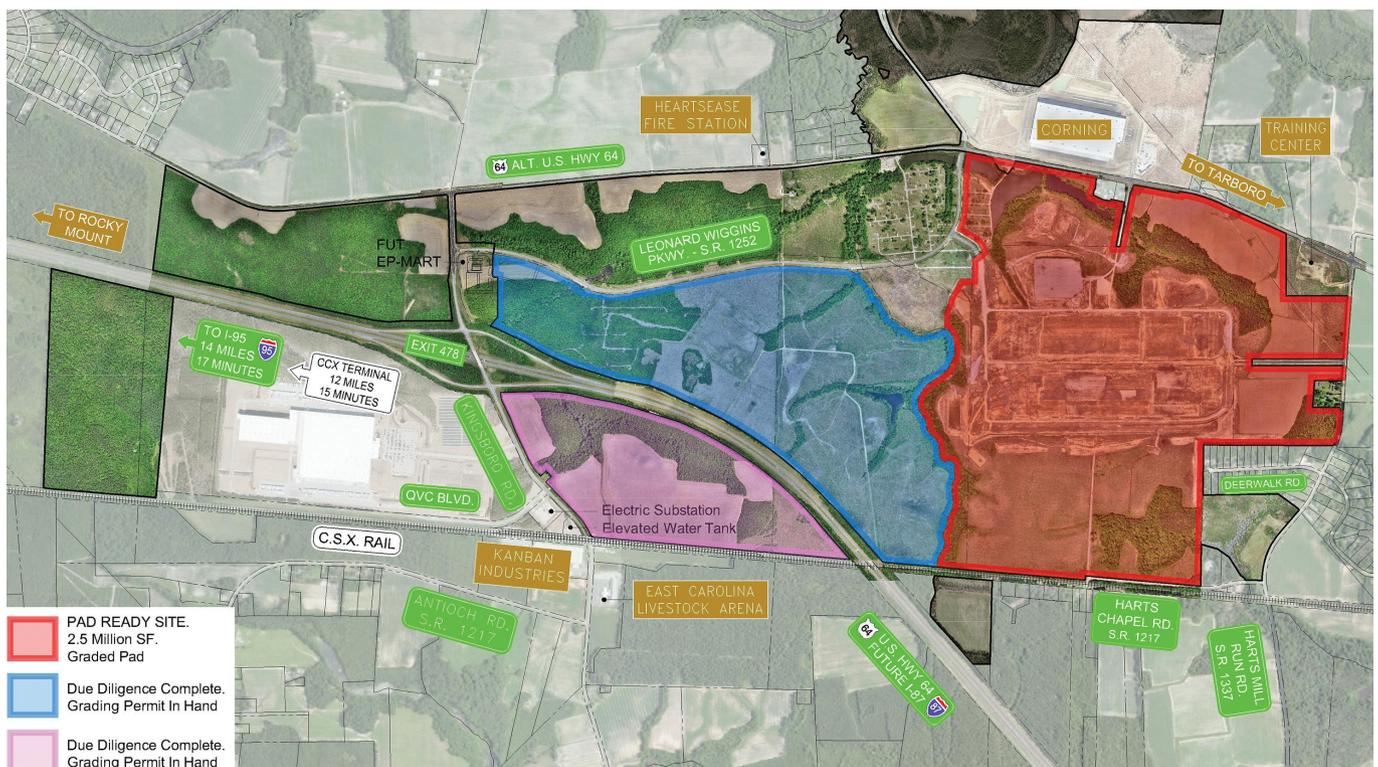
with and will announce later on."

The N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles moved its headquarters and 500 jobs to Rocky Mount in 2020. Farris remembers how that deal began. "I read an article that said the state would consider locating it outside of Raleigh, but in the general vicinity of Wake County, and would consider a county that was impoverished," he says. "I was on my way to North Carolina Wesleyan [University in Rocky Mount], and I'm going by what used to be the world headquarters for Hardee's before they were bought out by Carl's Jr., then PNC Bank located there before moving to Raleigh. The building was empty, and the campus has a five-story black-exterior building and several out buildings. And I thought, it's right off [U.S. 64], and there are no stoplights between there and Raleigh."

Farris met with Tolson, and they discussed the site's potential and the impact of having DMV's headquarters. "And we went after it," Farris says. "It's a great deal for the state. Even after up-fitting, the cost would be a fraction of what it would be [to repair the building] in Raleigh. So, it's a win-win for the taxpayer, the employees and the Twin Counties. And it's something we — Norris and Andy and Susan — can point to and say, this is what we do. Success breeds success."

FEELS LIKE HOME

The region's recruitment hook is baited for businesses. But there also is plenty to hook people seeking a family-friendly quality of life, low cost of living, and quick and easy access to one of North Carolina's largest metropolises. And there's top-shelf



Kingsboro Business Park, located on 1,961 acres next to the CSX rail line, is strategically located in the heart of the eastern seaboard, just off U.S. 64 and 10 minutes east of Interstate 95.

health care and educational connections, whether they're in search of a degree or adding a skill or credential.

Phelps says it's all about the big picture. "We aren't just providing location," she says. "We have the whole package. The hospital system, which is UNC [Health Care], is a good selling point. We have quality schools and high school [career and technical education] training, and [Nash Community College] offers Career and College Promise, so they're getting an associate degree, and they're guaranteed a partnership in what they choose."

Nash Community College in Rocky Mount offers corporate and customized training, Career Readiness Certificate courses, Career in a Year training for in-demand fields and other options, including Ed2Go online learning. "There's a cultural change right now about children going into debt and going to college," Hagy says. "The parents don't necessarily need to go into debt sending their kids to a four-year school."

Carolinas Gateway Partnership's Jordan says the state's future opportunities for growth reside in rural North Carolina. "There's a tremendous amount of purchasable land," he says. "The labor shed is pretty doggone good, and our community college system is one of the best in the world. It would be hard to go to Wake County and find a 500-acre building site. It would be equally hard to go to Mecklenburg or Guilford [counties] and find affordable housing. Right now, Nash and Edgecombe have something like 600 houses coming out of the ground. So, you have a migration of not only industry, but you have affordable housing in an area that will provide the labor force."

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Tarboro adopted its Residential Development Investment Ordinance in 2019. It reimburses developers 50% of infrastructure costs after certificates of occupancy are issued. "The ordinance has stimulated the development of over 30 single-family housing units thus far and has gained a lot of interest," says Tina Parker, Tarboro's commercial development and Main Street coordinator. She says with sales and relocations, the town Planning Department has issued more than 200 permits for single-family homes since 2020, and a new internet service is coming online for residents and businesses.

Rocky Mount Mills, 82 acres of mixed-use development at the site of the state's second oldest cotton mill, stands next to the Falls of the Tar River. It's home to entertainment venues, office space, restaurants, retail and residential. "[It's] fully leased out on the residential village part," Farris says. "The mill homes have been restored. It looks like a Norman Rockwell painting, and the suites and offices that overlook the river are like

being in the Blue Ridge Mountains. That whole campus was repurposed about five minutes before COVID came. They put in 21 tiny homes you can rent for the weekend. They have fire pits outside, and it's right across from the main campus, where the craft breweries are. Nothing else in the state compares to it."

Rocky Mount Mills reportedly has become one of the state's favorite work-from-home spots. "And it's helped bring young people to the area," Farris says. "We've had people who have sold their homes and moved in."

Nash UNC Health Care, which operates 280-bed Nash General Hospital, outpatient provider Nash Day Hospital and a variety of specialty centers, has initiatives to make care easier to access in a social-distancing society. A community paramedic program, for example, began last September and is funded by grants to the Nash UNC Health Care Foundation. It provides at-home care for high-risk patients, including ongoing home wellness visits to check vitals and discuss care,

reducing the likelihood of hospital readmission.

An inpatient food pantry opened about a year ago. Eligible patients receive food boxes customized to their medical and dietary needs, so after discharge, they can heal at home without worrying about what they will eat. "Twenty-three percent of the population in our service area is food insecure," says Kirby Slade, Nash UNC Health Care's community development director. "That means 23% of our neighbors have limited access to food for themselves or their families. That's 7% higher than the state average and thus is a key social determinant of health we should work to address in our community."

The hospital's emergency department is implementing a concept endorsed by the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. EMS personnel, physicians, nurses and other medical professionals work in collaborative settings, an effort to improve patient care. "Our department's ability to hire paramedics

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to support our nursing staff with patient care right here in the hospital has allowed us to expand our ability to care for our patients throughout the department, from the lobby to patient-care rooms," says Dr. Alex Warren, emergency department medical director.

Improvements are being made elsewhere at Nash General Hospital. Lab equipment upgrades, including a blood-culture test that identifies issues in less time, helped save the life of a 10-month-old baby in April. "The laboratory team, nurses, infection-prevention professionals, physicians and many others did a great job working together," says Shairee Taylor, the hospital's laboratory manager. "It takes all of us to care for our patients."

The hospital system is in the stakeholder input phase of its next strategic plan, which should be ready in July. Feedback was sought from the community, staff and medical personnel and a plan will be developed this fall, according to a news release.

LOOKING AHEAD

Edgecombe and Nash are working toward a bright future. It's a collective effort. As part of its Planet 2050 initiative, Cummins, for example, added a solar array at its Rocky Mount Engine Plant, creating the manufacturer's second-largest solar installation. Its largest powers its Beijing plant. "We have made a valiant effort to create a product and market our county as a place to grow your business," Phelps says. "And we've done a good job of that coming out of COVID. I don't think we've ever been busier."

Train and truck traffic has been busy at Carolina Connector, a 330-acre intermodal terminal near CSX railroad's main line and Interstate 95 in Rocky Mount. CCX has three cranes capable of moving more than 100,000 shipping containers between rail and road every year. It opened in November and is one of 40 such terminals CSX operates east of the Mississippi River.

Tolson says CCX has already proven its benefits to the region.

"It's become a safety valve for all the ports congestion on the East Coast, Savannah, Norfolk ...," he says. "It's driving a lot of the activity that's going on in this region and not only in Edgecombe and Nash but in Bertie and Halifax and Martin and Pitt."

The state Commerce Department announced in June that Tarboro will receive an \$875,000 Rural Transformation Grant. Parker says the money will be used to stabilize the banks of the Tar River and create pedestrian access to its waters in downtown Tarboro. Other community improvements are receiving support. "Tarboro has received [Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality] funding through the NCDOT for the construction of sidewalks and multiuse pathways in critical areas," she says. "There has been a combined total investment of \$1.5 million over two projects in the past two years adding value to our community's walkability and safety."

Tarboro's Main Street Program has earned full accreditation. "The Town Council invested in a plan to renovate

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Courthouse Square, a public community space within the center of downtown Tarboro’s business district, providing a safer, more usable community space for community conversation, small events and public concerts,” Parker says.

Farris says Rocky Mount’s Central City Revitalization Panel handles conversations about downtown buildings. Some are being renovated, creating what community leaders hope will be vibrant retail at street level. Condos upstairs have already opened. Farris calls them gorgeous. “It’s kind of evolving a little bit more,” he says. “A lot have been vacant for several decades, and we want to assist an investor in making the right choice, how you can repurpose them.”

Farris points to several things that make this corner of North Carolina special. “We laugh and think maybe it’s in the water coming from the Tar River or in the barbecue,” he says. “But we are a community that’s developed leadership and entrepreneurship. Rocky Mount is a wonderful community where people care about one another. I can be in Raleigh in 45 minutes. But I like being able to walk in somewhere where everyone knows your name.” ■

— *Kathy Blake is a writer from eastern North Carolina.*



ROCKY MOUNT PHOTO CREDIT: CARL LEWIS



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