



# Blount Partnership

**Annual Report**  
**2022**

# BLOUNT PARTNERSHIP

Working with diligence, tenacity and determination, the Blount Partnership has established itself as the standard by which economic development, chamber of commerce and tourism development are measured statewide.

And with an attitude of never letting downturns get the best of them, the momentum generated by the huge number of jobs and capital investment brought to the county over the last five years breed the optimism for continued growth.

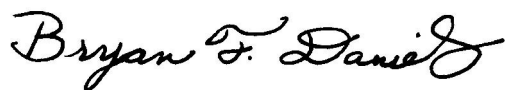
Per that ambition to make Blount County a leading economic driver in the state, the Blount Partnership will continue to strengthen the regional economy while enhancing residents' quality of life. By investing in the Blount Partnership through Chamber of Commerce memberships, funding of the Economic Development Board of Blount County and the Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority, you are helping to create jobs, attract new business, recruit a talented workforce and improve Blount County's competitive positioning and economic prosperity.

The long term goal of the Blount Partnership is to create primary, high-value jobs with competitive annual salaries with a significant capital investment. It also plans to work towards creating more opportunities for the business and family visitors as well as group travel while increasing educational and training programs for the business community.

Additionally, by hosting numerous educational training workshops and seminars while continuing to be an advocate for the business community by making federal, state and local elected officials available to its members, the Blount Partnership serves as convener for building relationships. Its strong commitment to workforce development is the key to shaping the county's future economic growth.

The Blount Partnership thanks you for your contribution to enhance our economy and quality of life. The importance of the role our partners play in the economic development of Blount County cannot be overstated.

Sincerely,



Bryan Daniels  
Blount Partnership President/CEO



Chris Soro  
Chair, Blount Partnership Joint Operating Committee



Behind the "Rockin' in Blount County" theme, nearly 300 volunteers participated in a membership event that created more community awareness. The dollars raised go towards workforce development, cradle to career learning, human resource programs, supporting existing industry, small business development, young professionals program, and community development.

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**VISION STATEMENT:** The Blount Partnership will earn a national reputation as the primary catalyst for this region's competitive success and economic prosperity, steeped in strong tradition and leadership.

**MISSION STATEMENT:** The mission of the Blount Partnership is to serve its members and stakeholders while promoting economic growth and stability, fostering community development and enhancing the overall quality of life in the region.

## Professional Involvement



## Continuing Education & Honors

- Kim Mitchell, Jessica Belitz, and Tammy Bolt graduated from the U.S. Chamber's Institute of Organizational Management (IOM) in Athens, Ga.
- Jessica Hahn received the American Chamber of Commerce Executives Silver Lifetime Sales Achievement Award for topping \$300,000 in her career at the Blount Partnership.
- Lauren Emert continued working towards her CECd certification by attending Oklahoma University EDI in Louisville, Ky. and completed IEDC's Business Retention & Expansion Course.
- Bryan Daniels was elected as the 2023 International Economic Development Council's secretary/treasurer.
- Blount Partnership staff collaborated with Williamson, Inc., on initiatives, best practices, and brainstorming.



## Conferences

Managerial staff attended the following meetings and conferences to gain further insight into national trends.

- U.S. Chamber Institute for Organizational Management
- International Economic Development Council
- Southern Economic Development Council
- American Chamber of Commerce Convention
- Tennessee Chamber of Commerce
- Governor's Conference on Tourism & Economic Development
- The Social Shake-Up Conference
- Tennessee Hospitality and Tourism Association
- Southeast Tourism Society Marketing College
- Distillers Convention
- NextMove Conference
- Site Selectors Guild Conference
- TVA Economic Developers Forum
- EDRP Retreat
- TNECD Governor's Conference
- Hosted ECD/TVA teams for a regional Orange Carpet Tour
- Japan-America Society of Tennessee, Inc. Southern Conference



*Top:* Kim Mitchell, Jessica Belitz, and Tammy Bolt graduated from Institute of Organizational Management. *Middle:* Blount Chamber VIPs visited legislators in Nashville, including Gov. Bill Lee. *Bottom:* The West Workforce Development Center opened on the Blount County campus of Pellissippi State.



## Chamber of Commerce



### Membership

- With the assistance of nearly 300 volunteers, the Blount County Chamber became the second in the nation to top \$400,000 in community programming dollars from 383 new and upgraded memberships during a two-day membership event produced by Your Chamber Connection.
- The \$423,228 is the most ever generated by a chamber in the state of Tennessee.
- Volunteers earning the event's top honors in leading the most productive teams were Drew Miles of Miles Farmers Insurance Agency and Robyn Blair of DENSO, who were named Godfaddah and Godmuddah, respectively.
- Retention rate for Chamber membership ranks at its highest level in more than 10 years at 87%.
- 30 Ambassadors made over 4,000 members calls

### Small Business Development

- Over the last 20 years, thanks to a collaboration with the Tennessee Small Business Development Center (TSBDC), Blount County small businesses gained substantial value resulting in significant economic impact.
- \$46 million in capital investment.
- 304 training events with more than 3,100 attendees.
- 101 businesses started resulting in 2,346 jobs retained and 354 jobs created.

### Member Benefits

- Once again, saw 50 participants in Small Business Saturday.
- Conducted 28 ribbon cuttings and grand openings.
- 21 networking events including coffee club, afternoon mixers and power connect luncheons with average attendance of 75.
- Conducted over 40 business education workshops and seminars ranging from women in business, networking, maximize your membership, supervisors training, including cybersecurity, marketing and HR focused.

### Advocacy

- Hosted the Regional Legislative Breakfast at the Airport Hilton with guest speaker former Gov. Bill Haslam.
- Presented updates from the cities of Alcoa and Maryville, along with Blount County and the three public school superintendents.
- Created VoteFactsBlount.com website and Facebook group to promote non-partisan election information about all candidates.

### Community Events

- Inaugural Long Table Community Dinner played host to 166 guests on the bridge connecting the public library and the greenway.
- Sold out Taste of Blount with over 25 food vendors. Newcomer Mississippi State took home three awards.
- Townsend Fall Heritage Festival saw more than 10,000 attend the two-day event.
- Partners in Politics saw more than 30 candidates participate in preparation for the August election.

### Young Professionals Debut

- The newest venture started is the Young Professionals group with over 160 individuals joining in nine months.
- Blount County Young Professionals held nine events in 2022 aimed at attracting and retaining young, diverse talent by providing inclusive and meaningful opportunities for career development and community engagement through service, connection, mentorship.
- Young Professionals also started a mentor program that paired over 20 individuals to help them grow professionally, personally, civically, and be active members in the community.

### Social Media

- Facebook engagement increased by 21% and is 10% higher than our competition.
- Instagram grew by 1.4% than our competitors.



The Long Table Community Dinner celebrated the connectivity of downtown Maryville with the greenway and Maryville College.



## Communications



### Traditional Media

- Conducted over 30 digital and print media interviews.
- Sponsored high school athletics programs at William Blount and Alcoa with paid ads to promote the community.
- Sponsored The Sports Page weekly sports talk radio program. Produced on Facebook Live, the Blount Partnership is branded on the screen along with two 30-second radio ads.
- Appeared on Dawn Steimer's Around the House radio program to talk about summer community events.
- Continued to build relationships with media representatives in print and electronic media.
- Worked to create the VoteFactsBlount.com website to be a nonpartisan resource about the candidates for the public.

### Social Media Success

- Renamed social media platform handles to BlountPartnership to reflect the continued use of the name in branding. It also gives us uniformity across all our platforms as we move towards a more community development organization where chamber of commerce activities, along with economic and workforce development, and tourism development all blend together to make this community better.
- Saw increased engagement across all social media platforms and ventured more in Pinterest for tourism.
- Peaceful Side social accounts garnered over seven million impressions.
- Blount Area Jobs social accounts combined for nearly four million impressions.
- Economic Development LinkedIn had more than 100,000 impressions.
- Chamber social accounts totaled more than one million impressions.

### Updates

- Created a ransomware and crisis communications plan to be instituted in response to either situation. The plans outline protocols for notifications and ready-made verbiage to push out on social media platforms.
- Upgraded still photography camera that has the ability to transfer images from the camera to a mobile device for ease in producing social media posts.
- Began working on a public relations plan to promote the community through the Blount Partnership's assets.
- Hired an intern to assist with social media and workforce development. This will be a permanent addition to the staff to help college students gain experience.
- Updated Blount Partnership's main lobby, large board room and conference room with updated imagery. This has not been done since the renovation in 2015.



*Top:* Company Distilling celebrated the opening of its Townsend facility with a ribbon cutting ceremony. *Middle:* Partners in Politics, a non-partisan community event, brought candidates together for fun and an egg toss. *Bottom:* Young Professionals from four counties met at a summer mixer at the Blount Partnership.

## Tourism Development



### Return on Investment

- Blount County ranked eighth in Tennessee in direct visitor spending of \$477 million in 2021 for a daily average of \$1.3 million.
- Saw direct labor income related to tourism of \$175 million.
- Saw direct tourism employment of 4,150.
- Direct state taxes totaled \$21.6 million.
- Direct local taxes totaled \$14.2 million.
- Each Blount County household save \$700 due to state and local taxes generated by tourism.

### Events

- Hosted the ultra-successful Grains & Grits Spirits Festival which sold out in five days.
- The convention space at the Airport Hilton is slated to host Rendezvous South meeting planners' convention in 2023 Presented Summer on Broadway with a silent disco.
- Sold out Hops in the Hills in the theater in the park in downtown Maryville.
- Townsend Visitor Center played host to numerous festivals include the Scottish Festival and Games which moved from Maryville College. Returning for the second straight year was the Bigfoot Festival and the Bronco Truck Festival.
- Great Smoky Mountains Hot Air Balloon Festival continues to be successful.
- Great Smoky Mountains Half Marathon once again saw more than 2,500 runners participate.



### Attractions

- Vee Hollow, a 14-mile mountain bike trail network, opened. It is free to the public and open all year.

### Townsend Visitor Center

- Improvements were made to the Townsend Visitor Center grounds with the addition of fencing, gates, and gravel roadways to aid in the ingress and egress from the area.
- A new event support facility was designed and is set to begin construction in 2023.

### Social Media

- Implemented SharpSpring which is a complete email marketing tool that is used to reach out to clients and market to new leads.
- In eight months, saw 2,500 submissions requesting a vacation guide.
- All platforms - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest - all saw increases in followers.



*Top:* Hops in Hills craft beer festival continues to be a summertime success in downtown Maryville. *Middle:* Expanded Townsend Visitor Center grounds allowed more visitors to the Hot Air Balloon Festival. *Bottom:* The second annual Bigfoot Festival continued to grow with more activities.



## IT Accounting



### Systems Survey

- Contracted with “Hire A Cyber Pro” to test and assess our IT network and cybersecurity vulnerabilities. Assessment resulted in a multi-year plan for implementing new Cybersecurity protocols and procedures including creating a Cybersecurity Incident Response Plan that was implemented immediately, an asset management document identifying approximately 400 IT related devices owned and supported throughout the organization, and implementing two-factor authentication on our Office 365 user accounts.

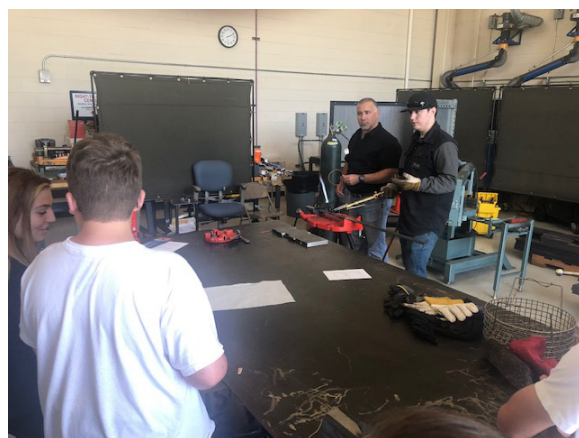
### Increased Wi-Fi Access Points

- Installed an outdoor Wi-Fi antenna for the pavilion area of the Partnership building providing access to the courtyard area of the facility.
- Planned and started implementation for an enhanced and expanded IT network at Townsend Visitor Center in relation to the expansion of property and pending build out of new restroom facility.



### Human Resources

- Joined Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) and TN Valley Human Resources Association (TVHRA) for human resources training and networking opportunities in the local area.



*Clockwise Top:* Afternoon mixers are one of many connection making opportunities the Chamber offers annually. *Middle:* High school students get the opportunity for dual enrollment classes and learn about careers offered from local employers. *Bottom:* Another avenue to reveal career opportunities to students is through the production of the eighth grade career exploration fair. *Left:* Grains and Grits continues to be a community favorite by selling out in five days this year.



## Economic Development



2022

### Economic Development

- 12 New project site visits.
- 10 Existing industries expanded.
- 22 RFI submissions in partnership with ECD and TVA.
- Awarded ThreeStar Community Development certification.
- Manufacturing Month – Boys and Girls Club Partnership, community survey, social media & marketing, and “Thank You Campaign.”
- Hosted 15 site selectors for an inbound trip at the Music City Grand Prix.
- Orange Carpet Tour - Hosted 13 ECD and TVA ED members to showcase UT, ORNL, GSMNP, Pellissippi Place.

### Project Announcements

- Ramston Capital, \$80 million, mixed-use residential in Pellissippi Place.
- Milltek Sport \$5.4 million, 83 jobs.
- AESSEAL \$40 million, Received Net Zero verification.
- Axis Fabrication \$10 million, construction of new head quarters & operations
- Completed Partnership Park South Road extension.

### Community Development

- Downtown Maryville Developers Group – convened group of developers to encourage downtown investment. All buildings purchased and various phases of development.
- Downtown Maryville Association Economic Vitality co-chair.

### Sharing Blount's ED Mission with Community

- Hosted ETIC to showcase Amazon and Smith & Wesson projects.
- Spoke to ETRLA.
- Spoke to Leadership Blount and Discover Blount.
- Hosted Alcoa High School's marketing class to showcase Amazon and Smith & Wesson projects.
- Hosted Maryville High School's marketing class to showcase Amazon and Smith & Wesson projects.

### Awards and Leadership Opportunities

- Accepted into the TVA Rural Leadership Institute.
- Accepted into Leadership Tennessee Next Class 2023.
- TN Economic Partnership Board Secretary.
- ETDD South Rural Planning Organization (SRPO) Committee Member.
- ETEDA Advisory Committee Member.
- DMA Ordinance Review Committee Member.

### Social Media

- LinkedIn gained over 400 new followers and saw post engagement increase 144%.



Top: Blount County received the state of Tennessee's ThreeStar Community Development certification.  
Bottom: Community stakeholders and elected officials toured the Amazon facility.



## Workforce Development



### BlountAreaJobs.com Relaunched

- Relaunched BlountAreaJobs.com in June. This site allows employers to post open positions, gather resumes and schedule interviews, while job seekers can browse for jobs, create profiles, and learn about educational resources to advance their careers.
- The site features a quality-of-life section where visitors can learn more about Blount County, its education system and even use its cost-of-living calculator. It will make searching for career opportunities or even part-time jobs more convenient for those seeking to work in Blount County or the region.

### Initiatives Started or Continued

- Convened Aerospace industry partners to plan A&P Mechanic School with TCAT/PSTCC.

#### Birth to 5 Years

- In 2022 started Early Education Task Force made up of schools, parents, industry leaders, non-profits, and other interested stakeholders – working on projects to increase early literacy, kindergarten readiness, the number of elementary students reading on grade level, and the capacity of childcare.

#### Elementary Education

- Careers in Motion Bus launched to promote high-wage, high-demand, high-skill career and technical education related programs to students.
- Partner with Junior Achievement on curriculum that is utilized in local elementary and middle schools for career education.

#### Middle School Education

- Offered exposure to careers through the 8th Grade Career Exploration Fair and 8th grade visits to Mississippi State to explore programs and careers. Blount Partnership staff taught middle school entrepreneurship course .

#### High School

- Worked with counselors, career and technical education directors to demonstrate the local opportunities for both students wishing to attend college and those wanting to join the workforce immediately upon graduation. Those efforts include introduction to the Blount County Job Fair, classroom presentations, mock interviews, resume reviews, work-based learning placement assistance, TVYA apprenticeships, internships, career pathways provided to students and parents, dual credit and enrollment collaboration, GIVE grant career camps (Young Manufacturers Academy, Construction Camp).
- A record 50 students participated in Blount County Job Signing Day which highlighted those moving directly moving into the workforce following graduations. This event has grown from six participants in 2018 to where it is today.

#### Post-Secondary

- Continue to work with those graduating two and four-year colleges and technical schools by teach networking and career related courses and attending all East Tennessee job fairs while assisting with job and internship placements.

#### Young Adults

- Provide young adults a chance to learn new skills and attain full-time employment through the Arconic Foundation Global Internship program.
- The Young Professionals program was launched to give development opportunities and mentorship.

### Social Media

- Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn platforms all saw follower increases.
- LinkedIn follower growth went up 621% over last year.



Top: A ribbon cutting was held for the Careers in Motion bus to promote technical education related programs to Blount County students. Bottom: Blount County Job Signing Day has grown from six students in 2018 to 50 in 2022.

# BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

## Blount Partnership Joint Operating Committee

Chair.....	Chris Soro, C2RL, Inc.
Vice Chair.....	Chuck Alexander
Chamber of Commerce Board Representatives:	
Chair.....	Trevis Gardner, MKAA
Chair-Elect.....	Drew Miles, Miles Insurance Agency
Past Chair.....	Chris Soro, C2RL, Inc.
Economic Development Board Representatives:	
Chair.....	Matt Murray, University of Tennessee
Vice Chair.....	Greg Wilson, First Horizon
Past Chair.....	Chuck Alexander
Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority Representatives:	
Chair.....	Tim Seay, Century 21 Smoky Mountain Real Estate
Vice Chair.....	Jewell Overton, ProNova Solutions
Past Chair.....	Bryan Cable

## Blount County Chamber of Commerce Board

Chair.....	Trevis Gardner, Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority
Chair-Elect.....	Drew Miles, Miles Insurance Agency
Chair - Chamber Foundation .....	Rick Shepard, Leadership Blount
VIP Chair.....	Stephen Deucker, Cirrus Aircraft
VIP Chair-Elect.....	Dennis Dockery, Michael Brady Architects
Board Member at Large .....	Mike Lutheran, Royal Metal Powders
Board Member at Large .....	Tracy Queen, ICC International
Auto Sales & Services, Transportation & Petroleum.....	Kendall Case, Smoky Mountain Harley-Davidson
Construction, Building Trades & Suppliers.....	Ben Pinnell, Hickory Construction
Finance & Professional.....	Tony Thompson, Pinnacle Financial Partners
Government & Public Utilities .....	Tom Hatcher, Blount County Circuit Court Clerk
Hotel/Accommodations, Restaurants & Recreation .....	Carmen Simpher, Little Arrow Outdoor Resort
Individuals/Non-Profits.....	Vanessa Painter, Blount County Children's Advocacy Center
Manufacturers, Wholesalers & Agriculture .....	Bryan Hayes, Clayton Homes
Retail/Service/Real Estate/Insurance.....	Joy Carver, Dandy Lions Gifts
One Year Director .....	Russ Bradberry, Cherokee Millwright
One Year Director .....	Brian Davis, Danny Davis Electrical Contractors
One Year Director .....	Robyn Blair, DENSO
One Year Director .....	Keeli Boyce, Express Strategic Services
One Year Director .....	Chuck Mabe, The Christman Co.
One Year Director .....	Kevin Painter, LeConte Wealth Management
One Year Director .....	Abhijit Verekar, Averro Advisors
One Year Director .....	Leslie Woodall, Blevins Group - Realty Executives
Ex-Officio Members:	
Chair, Economic Development Board .....	Matt Murray, University of Tennessee
Chair, Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority .....	Tim Seay, Century 21 Smoky Mtn. Real Estate
Legal Counsel .....	Matt Haralson, Kizer & Black, Attorneys
City of Alcoa .....	Mark L. Johnson, City Manager
Blount County .....	Ed Mitchell, County Mayor Blount County Government
City of Maryville.....	Greg McClain, City Manager



# BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

## Economic Development Board

Chair .....	Matt Murray
Vice Chair .....	Greg Wilson
Secretary/Treasurer .....	Gary Hensley
Member .....	Chuck Alexander
Member .....	Dave Bennett
Member .....	Joe Dawson
Member .....	Monica Gawet
Blount County .....	Ed Mitchell, Mayor
City of Alcoa .....	Mark Johnson, City Manager
City of Maryville .....	Greg McClain, City Manager
Ex-Officio Members:	
Legal Counsel .....	Robert N. Goddard, Goddard & Gamble
Chamber Representative .....	Trevis Gardner

## Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority Board

Chair .....	Tim Seay, Century 21 Smoky Mountain Real Estate
Vice Chair .....	Jewell Overton, ProNova Solutions
Secretary/Treasurer .....	Boyce Smith, Walmart
Business/Resident Representative Alcoa .....	Bryan Cable
Business/resident Representative Walland/Townsend Area .....	Chad Rochelle, Dogwood Cabins
Business/Resident Representative Maryville .....	Joy Carver, Dandy Lions
City of Alcoa Representative .....	Mark L. Johnson, City Manager
City of Maryville Representative .....	Greg McClain, City Manager
Blount County Mayor or County Commission Rep. ....	Jeff Jopling, Blount County Commissioner
Chamber Representative .....	Drew Miles

## Blount Partnership Staff

President/CEO .....	Bryan Daniels
Vice President .....	Tammi Ford
Director of Workforce Development .....	Jessica Belitz
Director of Economic Development .....	Lauren Emert
Director of Membership .....	Jessica Hahn
Director of Accounting & Human Resources .....	Bruce Kerr
Director of Tourism .....	Kim Mitchell
Director of Communications .....	Jeff Muir
Executive Administrative Assistant .....	Brenda Farner
Administrative Project Manager .....	Paul Monroe
Events Manager .....	Tammy Bolt
Social Media Manager .....	Alyssa Smith
Facilities Manager .....	Robert Galyon
Facilities Associate .....	Mike Webb
Administrative Assistant .....	Deborah Nye
Administrative Assistant .....	Amy Lawson
Administrative Assistant .....	Alexa Johns
Maryville Welcome Center Host .....	Kasey Ferguson
Townsend Welcome Center Host .....	Sharon Thornton





Cirrus Aircraft constructs new hangars.



Blount County Job Fair



IXsystems Ribbon Cutting



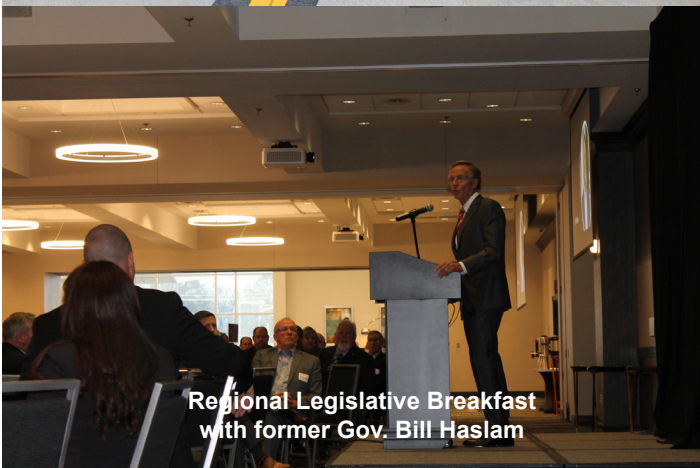
Dancing Bear Lodge chef Jeff Carter addresses audience at the Long Table Community Dinner.



134th Air Refueling Wing Hangar Ribbon Cutting



Bronco Truck Festival



Regional Legislative Breakfast with former Gov. Bill Haslam



Scottish Festival and Games