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SPRING 2013

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Business & Economic Research Center

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Rutherford



T E N N E S S E E ' S
BUSINESS

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**MIDDLE
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State Farm Summer Business Camp students learn teamwork skills by working together to create a tower made of straws.

Tennessee's Business provides an exchange of ideas in the fields of economics and business among businesspersons, academicians, and government officials. The opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the Business and Economic Research Center, Jones College of Business, or MTSU but are the responsibility of the individual authors. The material may be reproduced with acknowledgement of the source.

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Thanks to Sandy Ponder, vice president of workforce development, Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce, for help in coordinating this issue.

BUILDING A SKILLED WORKFORCE

To Support a Thriving Rutherford County

by **Sandy Ponder**

Vice President of Workforce Development, Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce

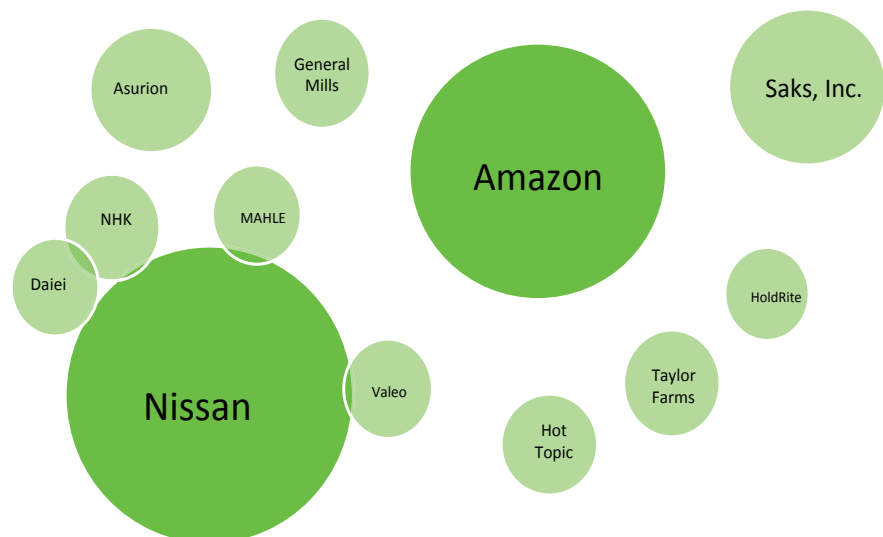
[October 2012 data]

It is predicted that by 2019, the Nashville area will add nearly 151,000 jobs. About 45 percent of these new jobs will require some form of postsecondary experience.

We are fortunate to live in a thriving community with access to quality education. We have top-rated public education systems and postsecondary education organizations including the Tennessee Technology Center, Motlow State Community College, and Middle Tennessee State University. We've experienced tremendous growth in the past decade, and our estimated 2012 population is 274,278 with an average age of 34.

According to a recent report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Rutherford County is in the nation's top echelon in terms of employment growth. While national employment, measured by the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) program, is up 1.8 percent, Rutherford County demonstrated an impressive 5.3 percent increase, making it third in the nation for percentage increase in employment. In addition, the report showed that

Job Creation



Rutherford County had a 5.9 percent increase in average weekly wages, surpassing the U.S. average of 5.4 percent, and placing the county in the top 45 percent of large U.S. counties included in the ranking.

Major Industrial Companies

Amazon opened in 2012 and employs 1200+ employees. Saks recently located in Rutherford County and employs more than 300 employees. Nissan continues to expand and add employees. The top six industrial companies are:

- Nissan (6000+),
- Ingram Content Group (1500),
- Amazon.com (1200+),
- Asurion (1050),
- Bridgestone (900), and
- Schneider Electric (900).

Job Predictions

The Nashville region continues to be an area of consistent, strong growth in population and favorable employ-

ment and economic growth prospects. According to the Nashville Chamber’s Workforce Study, these sectors will continue to grow in the next decade:

- healthcare headquarters,
- construction,
- advanced manufacturing,
- finance and shared services,
- distribution and logistics,
- creative economy,
- information technology, and
- hospitality.

It is predicted that by 2019, the Nashville area will add nearly 151,000 jobs. About 45 percent of these new jobs will require some form of post-secondary experience. More than 67,500 workers will reach retirement age in the next decade, and the projected gap by 2019 in the Nashville area is 23,688.

On the Jobs4TN website, there were 3,350 job openings in Rutherford

County in October 2012. These openings were in healthcare, manufacturing, logistics, education, and the service industry. This number does not include temporary-employment listings or companies that do not post their jobs publicly.

The most difficult positions to fill are skilled technical positions. There is a particular demand for skilled maintenance workers. In order for our manufacturing industry to continue to grow, we must identify ways to fill these positions and begin filling the pipeline for future growth.

Development Activities

In response to the demand for skilled workers, specifically maintenance and engineering, Motlow and Bridgestone formed a partnership to offer a mechatronics program. Mechatronics combines mechanical systems, electronic systems,

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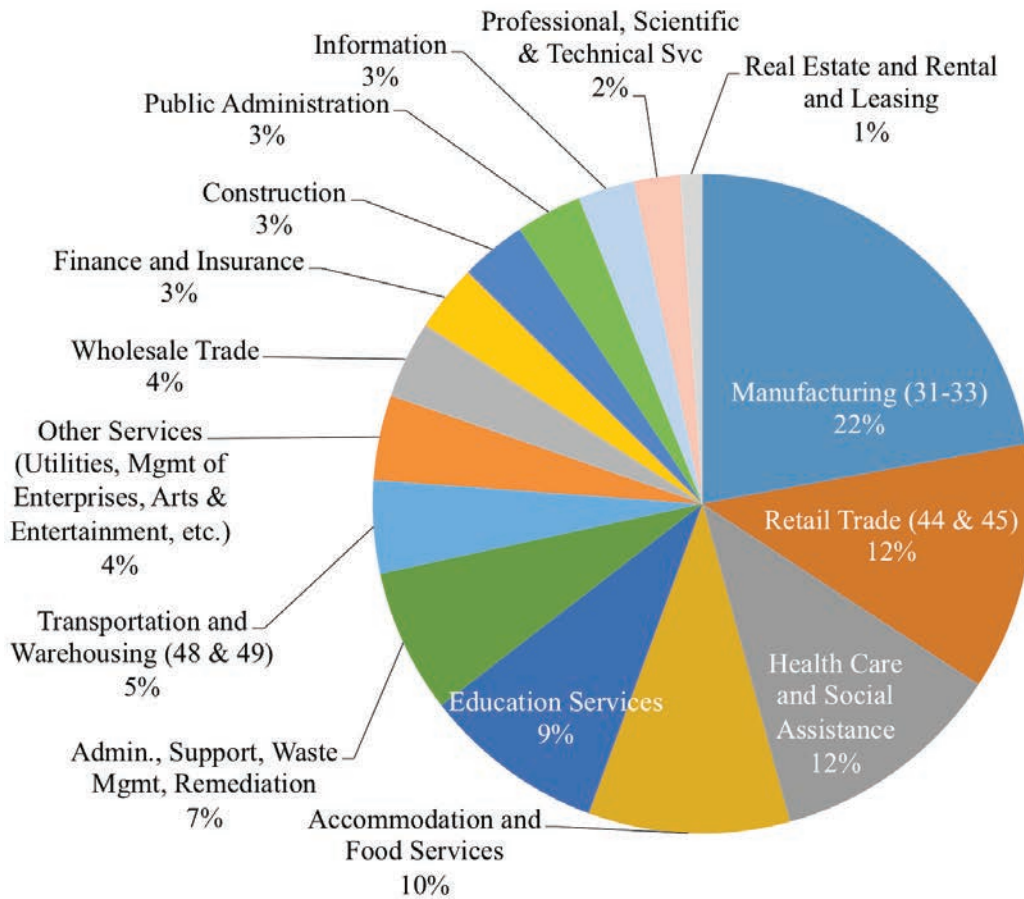
Rutherford County Job Openings



Source: Jobs4TN

On the Jobs4TN website, there were 3,350 job openings in Rutherford County in October 2012 in healthcare, manufacturing, logistics, education, and the service industry.

Workforce by Industry Sector



**TN Dept. of Labor
2nd Quarter 2012**

continued from page 3

computers, and control systems. At the Bridgestone training center, the mechatronics program has two labs full of state-of-the-art equipment made by the same companies that furnish the gear for the automated assembly lines at modern manufacturing plants such as Bridgestone and Nissan. Students attend classes five hours a day. In addition to benefiting Bridgestone and Nissan, the Motlow program will help train workers for plants that make products such as household appliances

and other consumer goods. This program is about teaching high-tech skills for advanced manufacturing, promoting critical thinking and problem-solving, and it offers international certification through Siemens. It will soon be the only one in the United States to offer a three-step pathway for advanced-manufacturing education. The first two steps are a one-year mechatronics certification and a two-year associate's degree, both through the Motlow program. The third step will be a continuation of the program at Middle Tennessee State University

that will lead to a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering.

Veterans Network

In the past several months, one short to mid-term recruitment strategy was developed: a veterans workforce recruitment strategy. The Veterans Welcome Home Network targets service men and women who are six months from military separation. The goal is to increase the number of skilled workers to meet the growing demands of industry. These skilled veterans have many desirable skills to meet our industry needs. The Ten-

Nashville MSA Job Gains, Losses (2nd quarter 2012 over the year)

Sector	Job growth (thousand)	Growth Rate
Total Nonfarm	10.2	1.4%
Professional and Business Services	7.1	6.8%
Leisure and Hospitality	2.3	2.9%
Durable Goods Manufacturing	2.0	4.8%
Retail Trade	1.5	1.8%
Other Services	1.2	3.7%
Financial Activities	0.4	0.8%
Information	-0.1	-0.4%
Mining, Logging, and Construction	-0.2	-0.6%
Non-Durable Goods Manufacturing	-0.3	-1.3%
Transportation and Utilities	-0.3	-1.1%
Education and Health Services	-0.6	-0.5%
Wholesale Trade	-0.7	-1.9%
Government	-2.0	-2.0%

Source: Business and Economic Research Center, MTSU

The most difficult positions to fill are skilled technical positions. There is a particular demand for skilled maintenance workers.

nessee Technology Center is in the process of hiring a coordinator for the program who is a veteran. He or she will be able to easily connect with other military personnel and actively engage with them by visiting military bases and recruiting at job fairs. The Tennessee Technology Center, Chamber, industry, city, county, and state are partnering to coordinate efforts to recruit these skilled workers to Rutherford County.

BEP

The Business Education Partnership (BEP) Foundation was formed in 1988 with the help of the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce. Using innovative programs for teachers, counselors and students

in Murfreesboro City and Rutherford County Schools, the BEP brings schools and businesses together to prepare today's youth to be leaders in tomorrow's world. The following are three of these programs.

- **State Farm Summer Business Camp** is a two-week entrepreneurship camp for middle school students. Students learn about the different parts of a business, work in teams to create a business plan, and present their plan to a panel of judges on the last day in a competition. Many students from this program have gone on to careers in business, medicine, law, and education.
- **Bc3 Academy for Math/Sci-**

ence Study Enhancement is a state-approved STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) professional development program for sixth through 12th grade math, science, and technology teachers that helps them to understand the link between classroom curriculum and jobs.

- **Express Yourself Arts Conference** gives creative students in Rutherford County's high schools the opportunity to explore careers in the arts or arts-related fields. ■

For more information, contact Sandy Ponder, Rutherford County Chamber, sponder@rutherfordchamber.org.

Tennessee SCORE

State Collaborative on Reforming Education

Compiled from a presentation by
David Mansouri, Director of Advocacy and Communications, Tennessee SCORE

SCORE seeks two outcomes:

- **Ultimately, every student in Tennessee graduates high school prepared for college and career.**
- **Tennessee is the fastest improving state in the country on the key student outcomes that will lead to college and career preparedness.**

The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) collaboratively supports Tennessee's work to prepare students for college and the workforce. We are an independent, nonprofit, and non-partisan advocacy and research institution, founded by former U.S. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist in 2009.

SCORE inspires leaders by sustaining momentum around a common education reform agenda, holds a mirror up to the state to illuminate what is working and identify key challenges, and supports work to innovate and develop creative solutions to educational challenges.

SCORE seeks two outcomes:

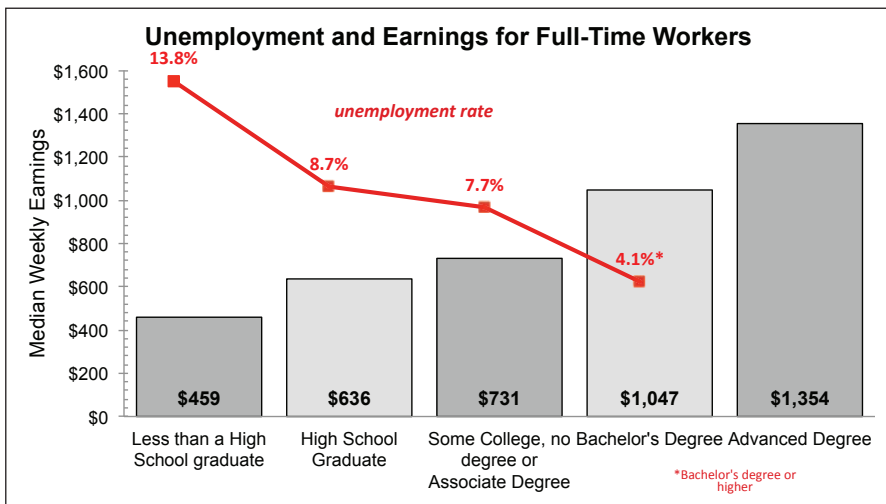
- Ultimately, every student in Tennessee graduates high school prepared for college and career.
- Tennessee is the fastest improving state in the country on the key student outcomes that will lead to college and career preparedness.

SCORE's work is governed by a theory of change that includes embracing high academic standards, cultivating great school and district leaders, ensuring excellent teaching in every classroom, and using data to enhance student learning.

Preparation for a 21st-Century Economy

- There are about three million job openings across the United States that cannot be filled today because of a lack of skilled workers.
- Seventy percent of 25- to 54-year-old African-American men without a high school diploma have no job.
- A college graduate makes an average of \$1.2 million more during his career than a worker with only a high school diploma.
- Seven of the 10 fastest-growing occupations in Tennessee require a postsecondary education.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics, the unemployment rate in



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011

Workers with higher education levels earn more and have a lower unemployment rate.

2011 for full-time workers without a high school diploma was 13.8 percent. For workers with a bachelor's degree or higher, it was 4.1 percent.

Tennessee's Challenge

The biggest challenge is that too few students are graduating from high school prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce.

Despite recent gains, for every 100 ninth-graders in Tennessee, 86 will graduate from high school; of those 86 only 49 will enroll in public post-

secondary education; and of those 49, only 51 percent will complete postsecondary education within six years of high school graduation.

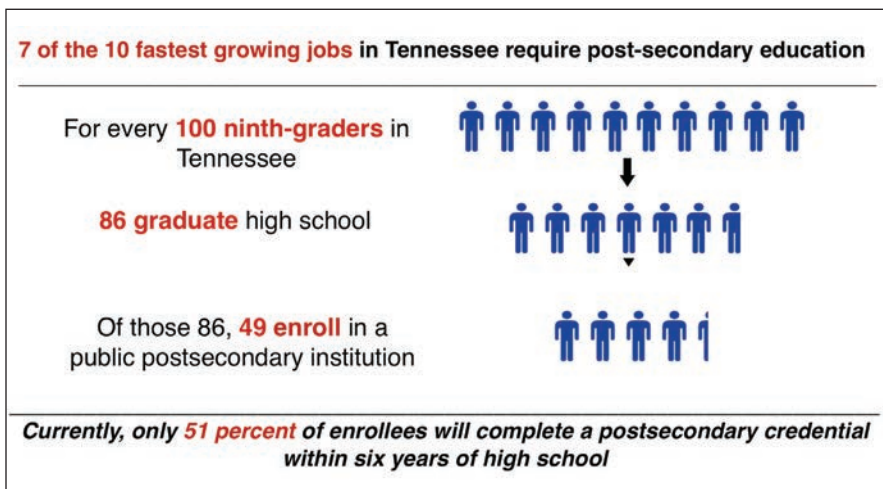
According to the ACT, only 16 percent of 11th graders in Tennessee are "college-ready" across all four ACT benchmarks: English, reading, math, and science. The national average is 25 percent.

The average 2011-2012 ACT score in Rutherford County was 19.8. The Williamson County average was

22.9. The state average is 19.2.

There have been important improvements in student achievement data over the past few years. Between 2011 and 2012, the percent of students who scored proficient or advanced in third- to eighth-grade math increased six percentage points in Murfreesboro City Schools and seven percentage points in Rutherford County Schools. The statewide improvement was just above six per-

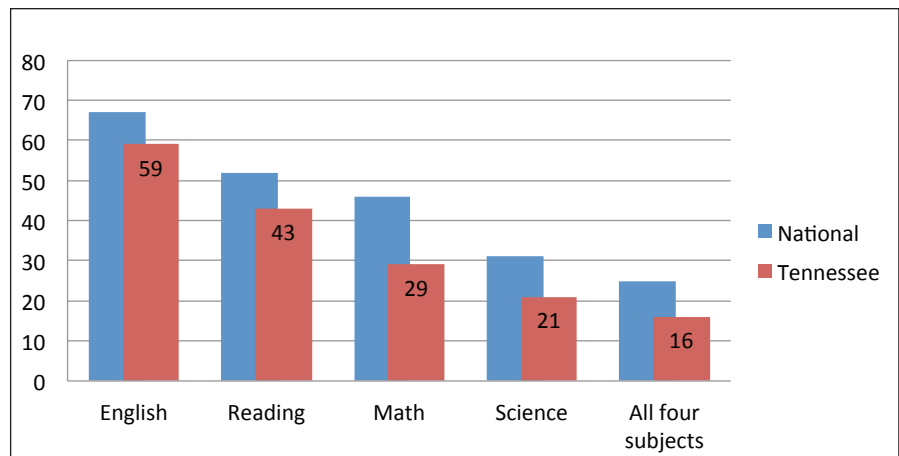
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Source: Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Tennessee Dept. of Education, 2010-2011

Far too few Tennessee 9th-graders will eventually graduate from postsecondary education.

Only 16 percent of Tennessee 11th graders are “college-ready” across all four ACT subject areas.



Source: ACT, 2012

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centage points.

We have seen even more significant gains in algebra. Between 2011 and 2012, there was an almost 12 percentage point increase in Rutherford County in the number of students who scored proficient or advanced in Algebra I.

Education Reform

Tennessee has an innovative plan to dramatically improve student achievement in our state. The larg-

est pieces of this work are:

- high academic standards for all students;
- supporting and fostering effective teaching;
- turning around the state’s lowest-performing schools;
- accountability for students, teachers, schools, and school districts;
- the use of data to inform and improve instruction; and
- a specific focus on the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

	ACT 3-Year Average Score	College-Going Rate, 2009-10	% of 11 th Graders Who Are College Ready
Rutherford County	20.3	56.5%	15.3%
Williamson County	22.8	78%	34.4%
Tennessee	19.5	57%	15%

Source: TDOC, 2011 Report Card; THEC, 2012

	3 rd -8 th Grade TCAP Math	Growth Over Last Year	Algebra 1 - % Proficient and Advanced	Algebra 1 Growth Over Last Year
Rutherford County	58.1%	7.1%	69.3%	11.8%
Murfreesboro City	59.2%	6.1%	---	---
Williamson County	74.6%	8.9%	77.9%	9.4%
Tennessee	47.3%	6.3%	55.4%	8.5%

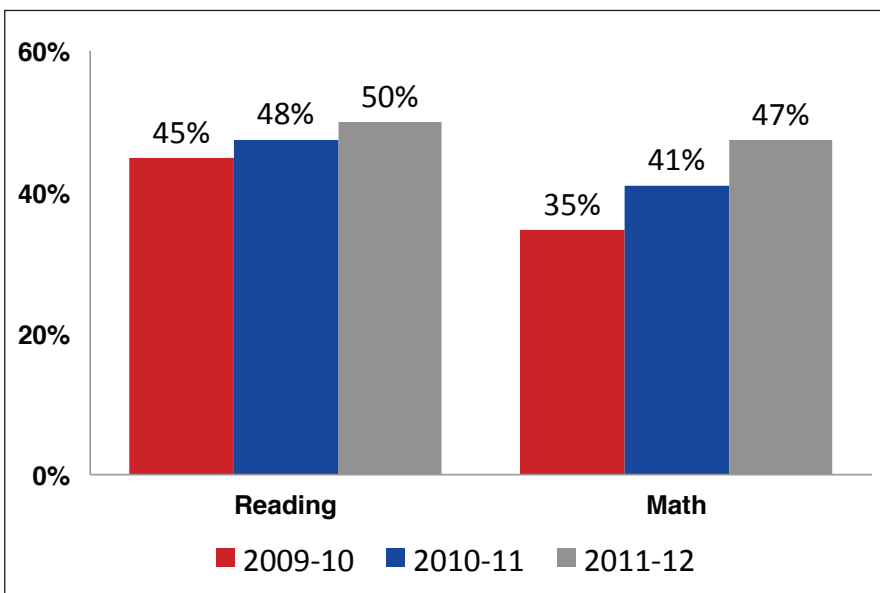
Source: TDOC, 2011 Report Card; THEC, 2012

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, it is our goal that Tennessee be the fastest-improving state in the country in preparing students for the future. We have made significant and important policy changes as a state over the past three years. Now we are faced with

the important and difficult work of implementation and turning policy successes into real student achievement gains in every school in Tennessee. ■

For more information, contact David Mansouri, david@tnscore.org.



TCAP* Gains, Grades 3-8:

Percent Proficient or Advanced in Reading and Math

Source: TDOE, 2012. *Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program

BUSINESS EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

by **Lee Rennick**

Executive Director, Business Education Partnership Foundation

A young man from a single-parent home with little means for acquiring a postsecondary education participates in Job Shadow Day where he impresses an executive at a state-of-the-art manufacturing plant with his honest desire to better himself. He is offered a job by that executive upon completing high school with the potential opportunity to study for the degree of his dreams in engineering technology paid for by the company.

During the summer after completing seventh grade, a young girl participates in State Farm Summer Business Camp, where she and her teammates struggle over in-depth income statements for a business plan competition in which each member of the winning team receives a laptop computer. Even though her team doesn't win, she comes to realize that she gained knowledge that would last a lifetime. She had "connected the dots" between school curriculum in math and economics and the real world, which made these subjects "a breeze," putting her ahead of her classmates academically.

During Professor Buzzo Discovery Academy, 30 elementary school teachers learned how to use the "Chemistry of Cookies" and the "Math of Project Runway" to intro-

duce new, more rigorous state curriculum standards for math and science into their classrooms. Hands-on activities involving life skills and students' interests showed teachers how integral math and science are to our everyday lives. Activities such as these make learning fractions, decimals, and percentages fun for students while helping them gain a general math sense that business leaders find lacking in current graduates.

"Students learn new concepts best when they understand how curriculum applies to their lives and future jobs," said Dr. Linda Gilbert, Director of Murfreesboro City Schools. "Our goal is to help students and teachers see how what is taught in class is applied in business so our future workforce is better prepared for the challenges before them."

"Currently, the most critical area for middle Tennessee, as well as the entire country, is to enhance science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education. We have created a new age of business, and our students are not coming out of school prepared to support it," said Dr. Tom Cheatham, director, Tennessee STEM Education Center, Middle Tennessee State University. "The BEP has created professional devel-



Students in State Farm Summer Business Camp use EXCEL spreadsheets in their mock-business financial plans.

BEP works with Murfreesboro City and Rutherford County schools to bridge education and business so classrooms provide students with the lessons they need to succeed in a constantly changing business and manufacturing environment.

opment programs for teachers and counselors and business and leadership programs for students which address these critical issues.”

We live in exponential times that are making the world smaller. Computers, the Internet, and other forms of electronic communication are changing the way we do business and with whom we do business. These tools are also making huge changes in the

manufacture of durable goods, how these goods are distributed, and even how we sell these goods. Business is getting faster as technology makes processes leaner. Competition for jobs is no longer regional or even national but international.

For almost 25 years the BEP Foundation has been working with Murfreesboro City and Rutherford County schools to create a bridge between

the worlds of education and business so classrooms are providing students with the lessons they need to succeed in this constantly changing business and manufacturing environment. More and more educators are going to have to prepare their students for a job market and a way of life they do not understand and often cannot even conceptualize.

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**Youth Leadership Rutherford
is a selective
civic-engagement and
personal-development
initiative for juniors and
seniors.**



State Farm's Debbie Bogle teaches Summer Business Camp students to use charts and graphs in the business plan competition.

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Our education system was created to support the Industrial Revolution, which took place over 100 years ago. But our current revolution is being created by the massive technological shift changing every facet of our lives. Manufacturing is experiencing the greatest upheaval. Over 4,000

skilled labor jobs are open in Rutherford County in spite of the current recession, yet we do not have people with the technical skills to fill these jobs. Many of these jobs have entry-level pay of \$50,000 after only two years of postsecondary education.

Recently a group of school guidance counselors along with their

principals and assistant principals, through a BEP Foundation program called Counselor Leadership Institute (CLI), spent part of a day at the new Bridgestone Mechatronics Education Facilities run in coordination with Motlow Community College. The goal of CLI is to make educators aware of current human resource needs, job trends, and educational

requirements, including “soft skills.” At Bridgestone a panel of managers explained the critical need for skilled workers and the opportunities available to their students.

“We are working very hard in industry and especially manufacturing to change the image and perception that people have of our business,” stated Keith Hamilton, manager of Bridgestone’s North American Mechatronics Education Center. “We want to raise awareness of what jobs are like in modern manufacturing and how a career in one of the technology fields is a great opportunity for young people. So we want to reach out to educators to be our partners in sharing this information with their students and the parents of their students. We believe that having the support of educators and having them as a partner is essential to the long-term strategy of growing the workforce locally, and in the end this will benefit all of our citizens in the great state of Tennessee.”

As a counselor at Oakland High School, Mary Richardson sees the importance of growing this relationship with Bridgestone and other manufacturers. She notes that the partnership between manufacturing and education is great news for students because this field of study is going to be in high demand for the next 10 years due to the number of Baby Boomers retiring and the constant advancement in technology that is changing the face of manufacturing and creating even more tech-skilled jobs.

While high-tech job training is a

high-priority focus, it is not the only area in which the BEP works with local school systems. This organization is also working to prepare tomorrow’s leaders through Youth Leadership Rutherford and State Farm Summer Business Camp.

Youth Leadership Rutherford is a selective civic-engagement and personal-development initiative for high school juniors and seniors. Participants learn about the community, economic, educational, and governmental structure and interactions within the county as well as participating in leadership-training activities, completing a group service project for a local nonprofit, and keeping a journal detailing their personal-development journey during the year-long program.

State Farm Summer Business Camp is an entrepreneurial academy for middle school students that introduces them to the world of business and economics through hands-on activities, workshops, and tours of local business and manufacturing.

“In my current role managing finances and operations of a charter school, I’ve used a great deal of knowledge and skill sets I learned from both Youth Leadership Rutherford and State Farm Summer Business Camp that are absolutely essential to my job,” noted Charity Hemphill Frierson, who was in the first Business Camp class 12 years ago. “Since I work in education, compliance with local, state, and federal regulations is crucial. My experiences in Youth Leadership Rutherford gave me a good starting

point to understand how government agencies are organized and the types of challenges they typically face. This insight has given me more rapport with our contacts in those places.”

Hemphill-Frierson brings up the key to building the bridge between the worlds of education and business: developing understanding. The BEP works to create this understanding through programming that brings about interactions and dialogue between business, students, and educators.

“Business Camp showed me that people are the key to achieving any goal a person chooses to pursue, whether in business or their personal life,” noted James Gibson, another first-year Business Camp graduate. “It is important to understand people in general and especially the people you interact with on a regular basis. Communication is the key to that understanding.”

Gibson sums up the foundation’s purpose well. All of the examples of BEP Foundation programming discussed here are the result of bringing people together to share knowledge and skills to ensure the continued economic growth of Rutherford County by teaching our students the skills they need to succeed with all the changes created by the technological revolution we are experiencing. ■

For more information on BEP, its programming, and a lesson plan resource for teachers, visit www.rutherfordbep.org.

■ PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

by **Kate Shellnutt**

Deputy Director of Communications, Tennessee Department of Education

A pioneering Tennessee career-prep program is working to close the gap between schools and industry, enabling students to get on-the-job training in the careers their communities need.

While today's graduates face the toughest job market in decades, companies across Tennessee are bracing to find workers skilled enough to fill the positions left by retiring Baby Boomers.

"Pathways to Prosperity addresses both issues. It allows students to gain valuable training and companies to build strong pathways for employment long-term," said Nick Hansen, the program's director at the Tennessee Department of Education.

Hansen and Assistant Commissioner for Career and Technical Education Danielle Mezera are currently working with schools, higher education institutions, and companies to establish industry-specific programs for students in Tennessee's Southeast and Upper Cumberland

regions. Middle school students in area school districts will be able to participate in pilot versions starting in the 2013-2014 school year.

"We want to make sure Tennessee's programs of study at the high school level align clearly with the needs and opportunities in our state, allowing both students and their communities to be successful," said Mezera. "Through this network, schools will make more, stronger connections with community leaders, businesses, and industries in their areas and provide students with relevant pathways to future careers."

Pathways to Prosperity launched in Tennessee and five other states in 2012, in collaboration with national education nonprofit Jobs for the Future and Harvard University's Graduate School of Education.

The network builds on existing Career and Technical Education programs across the state and supports efforts by Governor Bill Haslam and the Tennessee Department of Educa-

tion to improve postsecondary readiness among Tennessee graduates.

In the growing industrial centers in Southeast Tennessee, Hamilton County is looking to set up an advanced manufacturing pathway after preliminary conversations with industry leaders at Volkswagen, which operates a Chattanooga plant.

In the rural Upper Cumberland region, there are a range of pathways being established across industries, including health science and information technology as well as pre-engineering and advanced manufacturing. In Putnam, Jackson, White, and Overton counties, the regional economic initiative Highlands of Tennessee has taken an active role bringing in community partners including Vol State and Tennessee Tech.

Pathways to Prosperity involves more than just having a company host a field trip or set up a booth at a career fair. University and technical center partners, as well as the companies themselves, have a say in shaping the classroom curriculum and offer students opportunities such as job shadowing, internships, and on-the-job training so they can earn industry-specific credentials.

These regional Pathways to Prosper-

ity initiatives make up what will be a growing network across Tennessee, combining rigorous academics with strong technical education in fields that their communities need most.

The need to better prepare today's graduates is dire. This generation has been hit harder by unemployment in the recession than its parents and grandparents, and Tennessee recognizes that the education system needs to do more to give students strong foundational skills as well as technical experience that many of today's jobs require.

Haslam visited with employers and educators across Tennessee earlier this year to emphasize the need to connect skills being taught in classrooms to the needs of employers.

“If we are going to be a state that attracts companies to locate and grow here, a state that keeps its best and brightest graduates here with good-paying, high-quality jobs, there is nothing more important we can do than to focus on education,” Haslam said in a press release announcing his administration's focus on postsecondary education. “There is a lot of consensus around K-12 education-reform efforts, and I think we have the opportunity to become a national model in approaching postsecondary education as well.” ■

University and technical center partners, as well as the companies themselves, have a say in shaping the classroom curriculum and offer students opportunities such as job shadowing, internships, and on-the-job training so they can earn industry-specific credentials.

MECHATRONICS

Mechatronics combines the industrial fields of electronics, fluid power (hydraulic and pneumatic), mechanics, and computer processing (PLC and microprocessors).

by James D. Davis Jr.

*President, The Davis Groupe LLC and A&D Enterprises Inc.,
Chairman, MTSU Engineering Technology Advisory Committee*

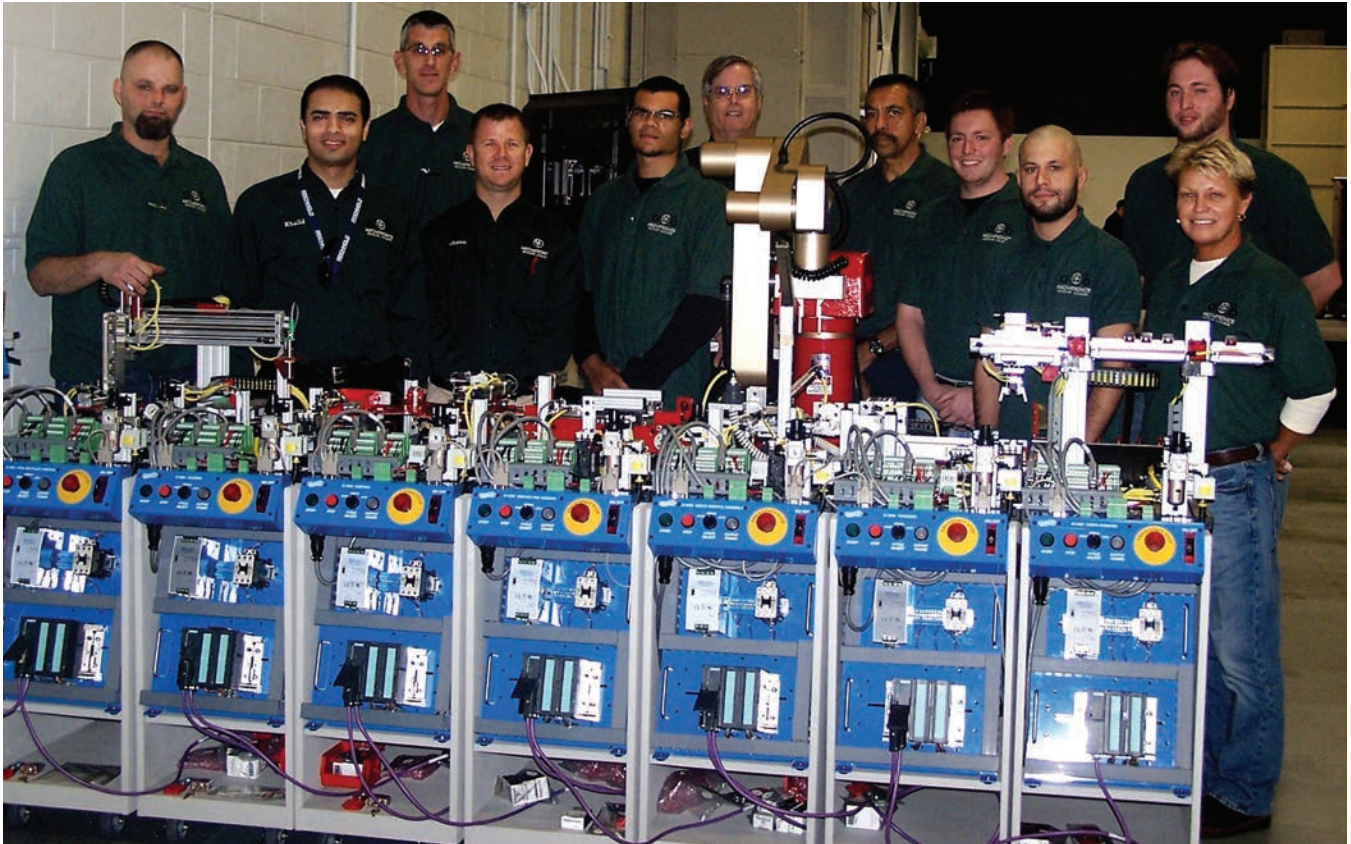
There are literally thousands of jobs available in the manufacturing and industrial sector in Tennessee and hundreds of thousands across the United States. This is also a global problem, because there are not enough people with the proper skill sets to fill the positions. The current situation will only get worse due to the fact these skill sets are not currently taught within the traditional school system and also natural forces such as demographics (retirements). This is an excellent career opportunity for everyone.

Currently, jobs skills required for these jobs are available through many avenues, but we have centered our efforts on a program called mechatronics. Mechatronics combines the industrial fields of elec-

tronics, fluid power (hydraulic and pneumatic), mechanics, and computer processing (programmable logic controller, or PLC, and microprocessors).

These jobs are medium to high wage jobs, typically in excellent work environments with great benefits. Manufacturing is coming back to the United States; actually, it never really left.

Rutherford County is strongly positioned for tremendous growth and economic development in this area. We have a great K-12 education system, a Tennessee Technology Center (TTC) that not nearly enough people know about or utilize, a two-year community college (Mottlow State), and of course the larg-



Mechatronics students and instructors at an open house for the mechatronics lab at Bridgestone in LaVergne: from left, Bryan Powell, instructor Khalid Tantawi, Jamie Thompson, instructor Shane Buchanan, Terrance Payne, director Fred Rascoe, Anastacio Hernandez, Adam Boyce, Joseph Gasser, Tyler Barton, and Jody Griffin.

est undergraduate university in the state, Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). This has given us the foundation required to develop a truly world-class program.

Parents must become engaged and understand what is available for their

continued on page 18

Businesses, community resources, legislators, and educators are working together in Tennessee and Rutherford County.

We are developing an “interstate” starting potentially as early as fourth grade for students to enter STEM-based education and eventually pick this mechatronics program as a career path in order to graduate from high school with specific career skills.

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children as well as discuss critical issues with them such as benefits, taxes, income, and available opportunities. We need to get the word out that these are good jobs. Traditional thinking is that manufacturing and industrial jobs are dirty, low-paying, low-skilled jobs, and nothing is further from the truth. These great jobs require the mechatronics discipline knowledge base plus soft skills such as promptness, good communication skills, a strong work ethic, and the ability to work within a team environment.

Businesses, community resources, legislators, and educators are beginning to work together in Tennessee and in Rutherford County to develop pathways for K-12 students to participate in a curriculum that may continue into postsecondary environments such as TTC, Motlow State, and MTSU. Internally, we call this the I-RC, or Interstate Rutherford County.

Together we are all developing an “interstate” starting potentially as early as fourth grade for students to enter STEM-based (science, technology, engineering, math) education and eventually pick this mechatronics program as a career path in order to graduate from high school with specific career skills. They can

then continue by going to TTC, Motlow State, or even eventually MTSU with the ability to exit the interstate at any time or drive until the end and have a globally recognized four-year engineering degree.

In many cases, employers will pay for progress down this interstate. Employers that are helping to develop this program in middle Tennessee include Bridgestone, Nissan, Southeastern Technology, O-Flex, and Yates.

It is not too late. Anyone can apply for tuition assistance to begin this career path, and the Tennessee Student Assistance Award (TSAA) program is an underutilized funding source. The interstate is available for access at any time by anyone. People currently out of work can get on the interstate by going to the TTC or Motlow State to begin the mechatronics program and build a career path that can last a lifetime.

Our vision is for this program to serve as a model for the entire state and potentially a program mirrored throughout the United States. ■

For more information, contact one of the educational providers listed or Sandy Ponder, Vice President, Workforce Development, Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce, at sponder@rutherfordchamber.org.

DESTINATION RUTHERFORD

by **Bill Jones**

*Chair, Destination Rutherford 2015,
Executive Vice President, Pinnacle Financial Partners*

Goals include the creation of 5,000 jobs.

Destination Rutherford was created as a public/private initiative of the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce to improve the economy and livability of the community by attracting significant capital investment and expansion of existing business and industry, creating better opportunities and jobs.

Since its inception in 2002, Destination Rutherford has been the leader for economic development in Rutherford County. The third campaign, *Innovating Our Economic Future*, continues to focus on increased tourism and new business attraction, retention, and expansion while embarking on a critical assessment of current and future workforce needs.

The economic impact of Destination Rutherford has been significant. Between 2007 and 2010, the program facilitated the creation of 5,081 new direct jobs, generated direct earnings of \$199 million, and brought in over \$2.9 billion in new capital investment. Expanded tourism efforts have resulted in an average economic impact of \$230 million annually.

It's no secret that every community's

success is tied to jobs, and in order to compete in the arena of economic development, all pieces of the infrastructure puzzle need to be in place. Workforce development is a crucial element, and Destination Rutherford is committed to working with key leaders to identify needs and create and implement a plan to foster success for the future of our workforce and our community.

Specific goals of the current campaign include the creation of 5,000 jobs, over half of which would pay at or above the county average. In addition to wages, the new jobs could generate \$274 million annually throughout the county in consumer expenditures.

Rutherford County is third in the nation in employment growth. An accomplishment such as this doesn't happen by accident. Destination Rutherford has positioned the county to capitalize on its many strengths and advantages and foster an environment for significant economic growth. Through its initiatives, the program will allow the county's economic future to remain bright for generations to come. ■