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a year of community

2022



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community pride 06

Instilling and preserving community pride is atop local leaders' to-do lists in 2022.



venues of Vance 50

Whether it's a wedding party or a concert or play, Vance County has a place to hold it that would be the envy of many larger communities.

ENVISION VANCE 2022 EDITION

This is a joint publication between the Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce and the Henderson Daily Dispatch.

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Emrose Park a living sanctuary for the Vance community.
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from the
CHAMBER



*Welcome to the
2022 edition of Envision Vance*

This is an annual publication sponsored by the Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with The Dispatch.

It is made possible by the 65-plus local business, industry, governmental and nonprofit members of the Chamber who purchased the advertisements you see throughout the magazine. I encourage you to take note of our supporters and when possible, shop local and support local to purchase their products and services.

It is my pleasure to serve as the 2022 Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce.

Our organization is the voice of business, serving over 335 member firms, representing small business, industry and manufacturing, professional, financial, utilities, nonprofits, health care and the educational institutions in Vance and surrounding counties.

We continue to be recognized as an engaged and leading organization that advocates for business, economic development, small business development and growth, and leadership training.

We are fortunate to have a strong, dedicated volunteer board of directors who serve as the visionary, driving force to grow our Chamber organization.

The last two years have been tough for everyone, dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the challenges our businesses have had to face and overcome. I am proud that our Chamber board remained committed to our mission and worked together to lead us through this challenging time. As a board, we worked with our Chamber staff to adopt policies and added new programs, like our Human Resource Council and our Community Collaborative Council, to propel our community towards increased economic prosperity.

The Chamber has a strong support system, having built alliances and partnerships with other local organizations such as the county's Economic Development Commission, the city's Downtown Development Main Street program, Vance-Granville Community College, the county's Tourism Authority, and the Small Business Center.

These collaborations strategically position our Chamber to continue working toward building and improving our Henderson and Vance County business climate and quality of life for our residents.

Our 2022 theme for the Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce is "A Year of Community."

When you look at everything going on in the world, nation, state and on the local level, it is imperative that our Chamber organization continue to be known as a revitalized change agent, and as the convener and connector of people and ideas. Whether you are a new business startup or a long-sustaining business or nonprofit, your reputation grows as you engage with other local business, civic, health care, law enforcement, education, church, fire and rescue, and governmental partners.

The Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce believes that we all need to come together and work as a cohesive community, building alliances and partnerships, and setting goals together that will grow our community and move it forward.

Connect. Grow. Prosper. These three words are our mantra and are now included in our Chamber's new logo design.

The Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce is committed to connecting and growing partnerships, relationships, and friendships.

As a progressive Chamber of Commerce, we will continue to work with new businesses locating to our city and county, to provide needed resources to our existing member firms and agencies to help them grow and succeed, and to orchestrate new programs and training that will meet our member's needs and help them solve their problems.

Our Chamber has good resources and a significant number of members and partners who are experts in various areas. We are eager to use this network to leverage the necessary skills and talent to grow our Chamber and to be noted as the foremost business authority in the Vance County region.

While our local businesses continue to deal with the pandemic after effects such as the workforce recruitment and retention, supply chain disruption, and economic inflation, you can be confident that our Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce will continue to connect our business representatives from banking, sales, manufacturing, education, nonprofit, and professional professions to bring them together to grow their networks and to engage them in meaningful discussions centered around our collective support of our hometown and developing new ways to work together to make Henderson and Vance County a better place to work, grow, and raise our families.

We invite you to invest in our community and in our Chamber through membership in our organization.

We also invite you to get involved to help us grow our community spirit and promote a stronger community pride in our city and county, throughout our downtown, our neighborhoods, in our outlying rural communities and across our government ward and districts.

We believe that a community that is engaged and working together can be a powerful force. Come grow with us and make a significant impact in our community.

Ronald Bennett

RONALD BENNETT,
HENDERSON-VANCE COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
BOARD CHAIRMAN

CONNECT. GROW. PROSPER.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PRIDE

*Citizens: Vance County has
a lot to be proud of*

BY KELLEN HOLTZMAN
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Over the last few decades, Greg Etheridge has worked in Raleigh, Charlotte, Atlanta, Tampa, and Birmingham, Alabama. But not until the Vance County native took over as owner and president of Gupton Services in 2019 had he been able to enjoy the perks that a downtown business location can offer.

From Gupton's 134 Horner Street digs, Sadie's Coffee Corner is a short stroll, a route that passes by the The Dispatch's new office on South Garnett Street and the apartment space above it that Etheridge rents. Then, it's on to the Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce. Walk a little farther down the sidewalk and Etheridge can pop into Gear and Beer to shoot the breeze.

"As the community is coming back and those buildings are filling in," Etheridge said, "there is a little comradery that comes with that."

Sharing and restoring the feeling of community pride throughout Vance County has been emphasized for 2022 and onward by Chamber President Michele Burgess and Board Chairman Ronald Bennett. The theme has been echoed by local officials, so much so that it was a major topic during the Henderson City Council's March retreat, initially at the request of Mayor Eddie Ellington, who late last year during a city council meeting commended the volunteers around the community that perform litter sweeps that help keep the area clean.

Henderson City Manager Terrell Blackmon wants not only for city residents to take pride in where they live but for the rest of the region and state to take notice, to know that Henderson can be a desirable place to live and work.

"Revitalization of our downtown, development of new parks and improving the appearance of our entranceways into the city are just a few ways of helping restore civic pride," Blackmon said. "Further, we have amenities such as Kerr Lake and McGregor Hall which bring thousands of people to our community throughout the year. Not to mention the annual car show which is a huge draw for our city."

Compared to growing Triangle cities, Vance County can feel quite rural. But maybe that's just in the eye of the beholder.

County Manager Jordan McMillen grew up on a dairy farm in Pennsylvania in a county without a traffic light, 45 minutes from the nearest grocery store.

"When people ask why I stay here and why I am committed to Vance County," McMillen said, "it is because of






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Mayor Eddie Ellington delivers an address in a February event dedicating Henderson's Operations Center building on Beckford Drive to Andrea Harris, a Henderson native who championed equality and justice for all.



Perspective and gratefulness is key to community pride and I have an immense amount of pride and hope for our town and county."

— JORDAN MCMILLEN
COUNTY MANAGER

the people, the relationships and the need in our community. While we may want more for Henderson and Vance County and should always seek to make it better, it already has so much more than I had growing up.

"Perspective and gratefulness is key to community pride and I have an immense amount of pride and hope for our town and county."

The good news for those working to bolster civic pride is that they won't need to manufacture it; it just needs to be tapped into and brought to the surface.

Tommy Haithcock of Century 21 Country Knolls Realty noted the spirit that helped Relay for Life in Vance County outperform other areas with similar population levels for so many years.

Haithcock has stood in the middle of Dabney Drive for 10 hours at a time, twice a year to collect for the United Way of Vance County Coin Drive.

A Henderson Fire Department boot drive last year produced similar results, raising a record-high \$25,000 for Maria Parham Health's Angel Fund.

"We come face to face with hundreds of the kindest, most generous people in the world: the people of Vance County and Henderson, North Carolina," Haithcock said. "They are always ready to help others in need."

As a realtor, Haithcock is heartened by the number of Vance County natives he sees who move away, but decide to come back.

Clearview Church Pastor Abidan Shah, an active community member, is originally from India and his wife Nicole hails from Georgia.

"We have chosen to do all we can by God's grace to leave this place better than we found it," Shah said. "By the way, some of the best people we know are right here in this community, and they are trying to do the same. We are truly blessed to call this our home, and our best days are ahead."


Henderson is a place where customers are looking for more than an exchange of business.

At Gupton Services, Etheridge has taken notice that when folks come in to pay their bills, they aren't in a hurry to leave, and that's something that just didn't happen very often in those bigger cities where he worked.

"They want to walk in and sit down and talk," Etheridge said. "That's just kind of a small town thing, I think.

"... It just adds a little bit of charm to doing business here."

Tyler Davis contributed to this story.



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A 'CENTER'PIECE FOR INNOVATION

And the transformation of historic Henderson High

BY KELLEN HOLTZMAN
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From outside on a Thursday in December last year, the eight-decade-old brick building standing at 219 Charles St. could still be mistaken for the old Henderson High School, or Henderson Middle/Junior High.

On the inside, New Hope Elementary student Vicari Kearney sported 3-D glasses that made a moving image of a beating heart, projected from a computer monitor, appear just in front of his eyes as if it could be touched. Kearney was in the state-of-the-art zSpace lab classroom on the second floor of the school that is now home to Vance County Schools' Center for Innovation, a transformative edition for not only the school system, but the community as a whole.

"When we really think about our community as an ecosystem," Superintendent Cindy Bennett said, "the Center for Innovation is a very large part of the community. Our schools are. Other agencies and organizations are. I think the Cen-

ter for Innovation can in some ways be envisioned as that hub, that center of that ecosystem. It is our goal. It is our plan as we move forward with the next stages."

The Center for Innovation isn't finished — It'll be a multi-phase project — but it did open for learning exercises as of the 2021-22 school year, sharing a campus with STEM Early High School, AdVance Academy and Vance Virtual Village Academy.

The Center for Innovation blends the legacy of Henderson High with the vision of future education, an evolving process. The old Henderson High lockers are still there in the hallway. The auditorium was recently renovated and dedicated to the memory of Wayne Adcock. And the old library is now a multi-functional space that hosts meetings for various leadership groups at the local and statewide level.

"We really want this space to be available, and used, and for students to come here and it just kind of be an ideas place,"

said Aarika Sandlin, Vance County Schools' director of marketing and communication.

"That center is built on the premise of providing experiences for our students, our staff and our community," Bennett said, "and so as we begin to open back up to our community at large, we hope to host book signings or artists and residents — and the students could come and enjoy those experiences during the day, but we would also have times in the evening for community members to come in and to share in those experiences."



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The exterior of Vance County Schools' property at 219 Charles Street has a familiar, historic look, but inside, the tools for high tech learning have evolved.

RAY GRONBERG | DISPATCH STAFF

Ultimately, Vance County Schools plans for its Center for Innovation to be a focal point of not only the school system, but the entire community.

Also in the works, to the west of the auditorium, will be "Gargoyle Garden," paying homage to the gargoyle carvings in the Gothic architecture of the building that began being constructed in 1935.

Signage outside in that space where the garden will go are air travel-themed, marked "Arrivals," and upstairs has corresponding "Gate" signals.

The "Arrivals" sign actually features the date each Vance County elementary school is scheduled to visit the Center for Innovation, which acts as a rotatable hub for all Vance County Schools. Elementary schools were booked for the fall semester, middle school students were scheduled for the spring and some high school students have already been able to take advantage of the new space that emphasizes hands-on learning.

Think 3-D printing, laser cutting and all things science, technology, engineering, arts, and math.

Downstairs, on the STEM Early High School side, the "Atrium" cafeteria has been thoroughly revamped.

The Center for Innovation also features a robotics space, video studio and renaissance room.

On that Thursday in December, the latter was used by Andrew Markoch, the Center of Innovation's director of fine arts and physical education, to lead a class on "sonic conversations," or more generally, sound.

Nearby, Center of Innovation Director Destiney Ross-Putney taught a class in a STEM-themed room, complete with a wing of LEGOs.

Here, students learn how to learn, on the fly.

"I don't have to be right the first time I make it," Sandlin said of the mindset educators are trying to instill. "I can go back in and change things and do it again."

And that's exactly the collective mentality Vance County Schools has for the Center of Innovation. There's room to grow, adapt and reflect.

Current student artwork adorns the hallways of the Center of Innovation, as well as in the multi-purpose room where the old library used to be.



RAY GRONBERG | DISPATCH STAFF

THE STATE-OF-THE-ART ZSPACE LAB CLASSROOM IS ON THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE CENTER FOR INNOVATION. IN THE SAME BUILDING THAT WAS ONCE HOME TO HENDERSON HIGH SCHOOL.

Eventually, the school will feature display cases showcasing Henderson High history.

"I think it's important to us that we respect the history of the community," Bennett said, "respect the history of the schools and the district at-large because we want this to be truly representative of Vance County and the education history here. And we want community members to feel comfortable coming in and saying, 'That was my locker or — I remember when — but also see how it has been repurposed.'"

Ray Gronberg contributed to this story.

room to grow, adapt and reflect.

Superintendent Cindy Bennett

CONNECTS SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY

BY DAVID IRVINE
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Dr. Cindy Bennett is completing her first year as superintendent of Vance County Schools.

But she is not a stranger to the school system, or to the intricacies of managing educational programs.

Before assuming the superintendency in July 2021, Dr. Bennett served as Vance County Schools' assistant superintendent for student services and strategic planning for six years. That position gave her a unique platform to get an understanding of both the assets and the needs of the school district.

A major asset, she said, is the commitment of the staff to the community and to children. Members of the staff have volunteered to support the community homeless shelter, for example. And Dr. Bennett noted that members of the cabinet

belong to local civic clubs, regularly participate in ribbon-cuttings to celebrate the openings of new businesses, and actively involve themselves in community affairs. The feeling is mutual, she added.

"This is a community that embraces its schools," she said. Dr. Bennett said literacy is a concern, not only locally but also nationally. To address the need, the school district has made literacy a priority, capitalizing on one partnership so students can add books of their choice to their personal libraries. The district holds book fairs at which students can look over selections of books and select books at no cost to them.

In a related project, vending machines have been repurposed to deliver books instead of snacks. Students earn "coins" they can spend at the school store or at the vending machine. The school district participated in the annual "Read Across America," a day set aside each year to focus on reading. It's an annual event established by the National Education Association in



VANCE COUNTY SCHOOLS

1998 to get kids excited about reading. Dr. Bennett spent the day reading to kindergarten children.

The district is working to personalize learning for the students. It's an old concept, Dr. Bennett said, but they are trying to implement it in new ways.

Teachers are participating in staff development to hone their skills to help students work at their own pace — some faster, some slower.

“A small community can be very powerful when everyone works together”

"One size does not fit all," Dr. Bennett said. The schools are addressing students' emotional needs as well as their educational needs, she added. Commenting on the consolidation of schools the district has undergone in recent years, Dr. Bennett said there are no current plans to close additional schools.

"Our hope is that enrollment will increase as families realize we have something to offer," she said.

"We're not competing with private schools, charter schools or home schoolers," Dr. Bennett said. Rather, she hopes to collaborate with other education entities. For example, outsiders can use the labs or the Wayne Adcock Auditorium at the Center for Innovation.

"A small community can be very powerful when everyone works together," she said. As the schools reopened as the COVID-19 pandemic eased, Dr. Bennett noted that there has been some learning loss due to the outbreak. But the schools are not using the pandemic as an excuse.

"We're not allowing the pandemic to slow us down," she said, adding that they are grateful to have students back in buildings.

A native of Lake Waccamaw, North Carolina, Dr. Bennett received a bachelor's degree from UNC Greensboro, a master's degree from UNC Wilmington, and a Ph.D. from Walden University.

During her 30 years in education, she has been a teacher and then an administrator in Columbus County; a supporting instructor at the N.C. Teacher Academy at East Carolina University; director of curriculum, instruction and technology with the N.C. Department of Public Instruction; and executive director of the Strategic Twin Counties Educational Partnership supporting Nash and Edgecombe counties.

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Perkinson returns

TO AREA TO LEAD EDC

BY HENDERSON-VANCE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

If you ask 120 different people what economic development means to them, you will most likely get 120 different answers in return. While there are key components such as workforce, infrastructure, natural resources, and capital that must be present for economic development, there are many other elements that determine if economic growth is successful.

Often times people place emphasis on lifestyle, health-care and strong school systems as important elements. Others may focus on transportation and public safety. And, just as there are multiple factors involved, there are also many participants that work together to advance an economy.

Due to its rural setting in central North Carolina, Vance County has a strong state and local support system, with many people working to advance the economy for the county residents, and a region as a whole.

The most recent effort made to grow Vance County's economy was the decision to hire a new director for the Henderson-Vance County Economic Development Commission. McKinley Perkinson began her role in this leadership position on Nov. 15, 2021. And while new to this position, she is no stranger to the Vance County community. When asked what strengths she will bring to lead the economic development efforts, her response is all about passion and the drive to make this a better place for future generations.

"My biggest strength coming in to this position is my passion for this community," Perkinson said. "I truly believe this is a great place to live and work, and I convey that with honesty when talking to people about my community. I also have personal drive to create a strong economy for our future generations."

"I have children, and I can think of no better way to utilize my skills than creating job opportunities in our community so they can stay here once they join the workforce. I grew up in this area, and the mindset for my generation was everyone had to leave this area if they wanted to have a good career. I don't want that to be the belief of our current and future generations."

One of Vance County's strongest selling points for attracting major industries has always been location. Situated at the midway point between New York and Atlanta on I-85, less than an hour from Raleigh-Durham International Airport and within a three-hour drive to three deep water ports, there is a lot of appeal for businesses that need to distribute their products on the East Coast.

But in addition to the physical characteristics that have always made this area an ideal location for economic growth, the new economic development director says there is so much more than location that sells Vance County.

"It is really about the people, and their drive to make Vance County a great place to live and work," Perkinson said. "My favorite and most simple definition of local economic development is making the community you live in awesome. There is such a strong desire and a lot of momentum among the leaders and residents to make our community awesome right now. There are a lot of plans for future growth, in both resources and development for this area, that I am not sure there has been any better time to be a part of Vance County than now."

For more information about the Henderson-Vance Economic Development Commission, visit vance-countyedc.com or call McKinley Perkinson at 252-492-2094.

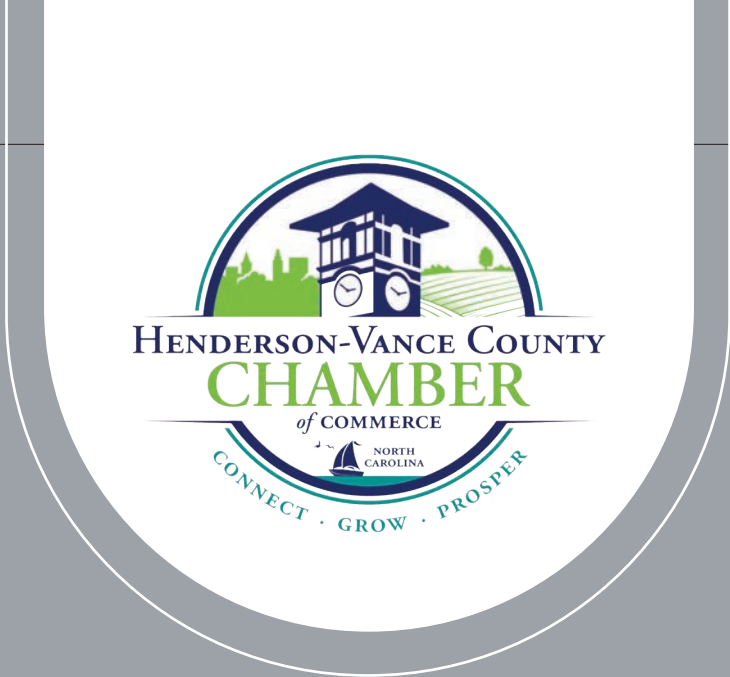


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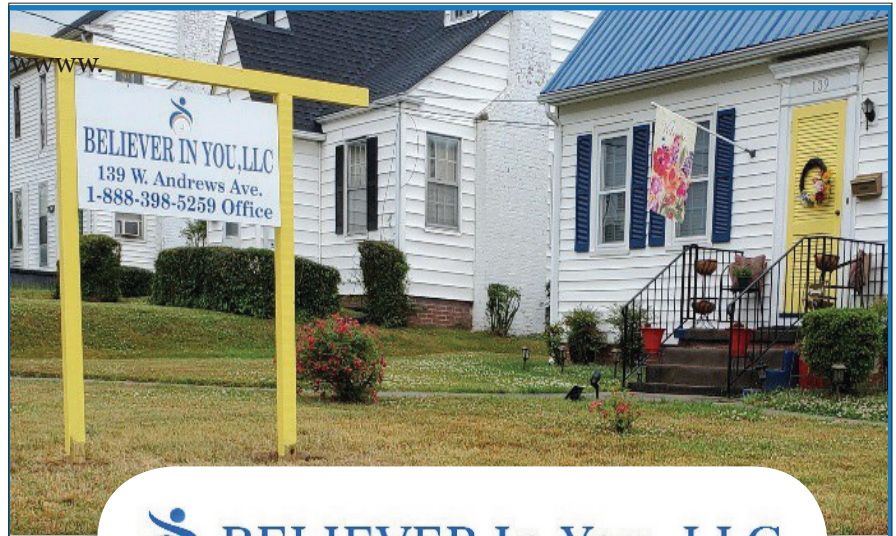
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ENVISION VANCE

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MEET THE LOCAL *young professionals*

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Heather Hodge
OWNER & CEO OF NELLA ROO'S

Some Vance County natives are actively reinvesting in the community they grew up in.

Among those at the forefront of the ongoing renaissance are young business owners and professionals that are using knowledge obtained from college and other resources outside of Henderson to build a foundation that will strengthen Vance County's reputation for attracting families and businesses.

Here are a few of the young professionals that have returned to Henderson over the past few years in an effort to be part of what they hope will be a resurgence:

Heather Hodge will be carrying on a proud tradition started by her grandmother Nell Wiggins.

This year, Hodge is set to open her own boutique store on South Garnett Street called Nella Roo's, which will sell a combination of women's apparel and gifts like kitchen items, homeware items, candles, journals and jewelry, among other products.

Hodge wanted to give back to her hometown of Henderson after graduating college and living in the Triangle. She said that starting up Nella Roo's was the perfect way to accomplish that goal while honoring the legacy of her grandmother's store in the once popular Nell's Boutique.

"I felt strongly that the Lord was calling me back home to invest in my hometown," Hodge said. "When I dug deeper into what that was going to look like in my life, the store started taking shape in my mind and became what I was working towards."

Outside of the success of Nell's Boutique, Hodge also worked in several boutique stores while she was in high school and vividly remembers the positive interactions she had with helping customers select and wrap up gift items.

The goal for Hodge with Nella Roo's is to establish a personal, small-town experience captured by Nell's Boutique and the other stores she worked for so she can further connect with Vance County's residents and provide them quality customer service.

"This decision was based on my faith," Hodge said. "Henderson is a community filled with incredible people and I wanted to come back and be a part of this community. I want to live out my calling in the best way that I can."

Hodge said that anticipation for the grand opening of Nella Roo's has already started to build in the community.

With so much support already being shown for her vision, Hodge is eager to carry on the impact of Nell's Boutique on Henderson through Nella Roo's and bring another positive development to the city.

"It means so much to come back and be embraced by this town," Hodge said. "The response to my boutique has been overwhelmingly exciting and positive. There's so much potential for good and exciting things in Henderson, so it's incredible to be a part of this and give the community a positive thing to look forward to."

Hodge is targeting a May opening for Nella Roo's.



Emily Shaw Abbott

VANCE-GRANVILLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE LIBRARIAN

As someone who has a bachelor's degree in history, Emily Shaw Abbott understands the importance of its preservation on both a national and local level.

Abbott sought to fulfill that passion when she returned to Henderson after obtaining her Master of Library and Information Science degree at the University of South Carolina in May of 2017 and is using that knowledge as a librarian at Vance-Granville Community College.

The timing of Vance-Granville's opening ended up working out perfectly for Abbott, who had been searching for jobs in the region that would allow her to settle down with her husband and fellow Henderson native Joseph.

"My husband and I were living in South Carolina and we wanted to move [back to Henderson]," Abbott said. "We wanted to start a family while being close to our families back home and while looking for jobs I just happened to come across [the librarian opening] at Vance-Granville."

Abbott began working in public libraries immediately after graduating from UNC-Chapel Hill in 2009, with her first full-time job being at the Warren County Memorial Library as an assistant.

Encouragement from her co-workers and patrons motivated Abbott to pursue an education for librarianship. The rigorous work Abbott put in at South Carolina helped prepare her for all of the evolving responsibilities she now has at Vance-Granville.

Along with assisting students in their research needs and being responsible for interlibrary loans, Abbott is also proficient with Vance-Granville's online databases.

Abbott hopes to be a librarian in Henderson for many more years to come while continuing to connect with the community and people that helped shape her desire to provide information to those who need it.

"This is where I grew up and I connected to this community through my church," Abbott said. "I've lived in larger cities, so it's nice to be in a smaller atmosphere where you can connect with people and Henderson is definitely a nice place."

Tyler Brewer

VICE PRESIDENT OF BREWER CYCLES

On his search for a sustainable career, Tyler Brewer's path took him back to his hometown and to his family business in Brewer Cycles Inc..

Founded by Brewer's father Chris in Jan. 1981, Brewer Cycles is a dealership that specializes in new and used motorcycles, ATVs and other vehicles, with Brewer serving as the company's vice president while simultaneously working as a Progressive Insurance agent.

Brewer said that he was essentially born into working at Brewer Cycles and has come to fully embrace his role as vice president after initially looking to work elsewhere once he graduated from East Carolina University.

"I used to come [to Brewer Cycles] after school and work," Brewer said. "When I was in college, I came back to work during the summer but I told myself I wouldn't go back to the small town life after college. However, I did end up coming back to Henderson and I'm learning the ways to take over whenever my dad is ready to retire."

It was a discussion with Chris that ultimately motivated Brewer to stay put in Henderson and help his father run Brewer Cycles, where he refined his love for the family business and sought to get more local residents interested in motorcycles.

"I love the business and I love what I do," Brewer said. "I grew up racing and enjoying everything we do sell. My dad and I talked a lot about everything from a money standpoint to a family standpoint, along with what it was that I actually wanted to do. I just kind of took a leap of faith and made the decision to come back."

Brewer sees his hometown as an area of opportunity for anyone looking to enjoy the small town atmosphere and intends to utilize Brewer Cycles, along with his status as a member on the Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors to bring in more young, innovative minds to push Henderson towards the future.

"From a small-town standpoint, it's important to get a lot of young people into Henderson," Brewer said. "Typically, there haven't been a lot of opportunities for young people in small towns but for me, I want to find better opportunities for those who live here now. There's a big family atmosphere in Henderson and I do what I can to give back and make this city a better place to live for all those involved, particularly those who are my age."





Wykia Macon

VANCE COUNTY 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Youth development has always been a strong passion for Vance County native Wykia Macon.

The Southern Vance High School graduate is currently fulfilling that dream as the 4-H director of the Vance County Cooperative Extension Office, where she educates and assists young children in the region about a variety of different topics that include agriculture, leadership and healthy living.

“Everything has been good so far,” Macon said. “I started back in July of 2020 and a lot of things were different back then. I was trying to build programs and relationships virtually. That was a little bit of a challenge but we did it. We made it through and things are picking up. Now I have a good base of children who are interested and we’re growing from there.”

A trip to Kenya following her time as a UNC Chapel Hill student inspired Macon to get her PhD and master’s degree at Florida State University and visit other countries to work on educating students with disabilities. While she enjoyed assisting people all around the world, Macon knew that she wanted to take a more grassroots approach with her career and ended up finding that ideal opportunity back home.

“It’s hard to pick just one thing about this job that I enjoy doing,” Macon said. “I love making connections with the youth in the community and giving them experiences that will help them explore their interests. I like to hear what kids want to explore and my goal is to bring that to them.”

Macon explores the ideas local children have through numerous programs offered by 4-H through the entire year.



Joseph Falkner

VICE PRESIDENT OF E-COMMERCE

Henderson native Joseph Falkner has fully embraced the ever-changing landscape of conducting business online.

Not a day goes by in which Falkner is not occupied doing something, as he currently serves as the vice president of e-commerce for Next Level Apparel while simultaneously working as an agent for Paddle Consulting Group.

Falkner, who went to N.C. State University as an undergraduate before obtaining an MBA at Wake Forest University, said there is tremendous value in ensuring people and businesses know how to navigate the e-commerce landscape in order to maximize profits and experience exponential growth during the current decade.

“E-commerce is a growing marketplace,” Falkner said. “Everybody is looking to shift online and figure out how to sell more products that way, with Amazon being one of the main channels. I wanted to position my career to go where the buck is going and now I’m at the forefront of everything going on online with sales.”

Falkner jumped at the first available opportunity to move back to Henderson, adding that his hometown is an ideal location for him to conduct business and enjoy everything about the city as it experiences an economic boom.

“Moving back to Henderson was an easy decision for me,” Falkner said. “In the e-commerce space, you can do your job from pretty much anywhere. You just have to be close to an airport and have a home office. Thankfully, Henderson has a lot of nice, affordable homes in the area where I can work remotely and the city has a lot to offer.”

With so much going on in Henderson today, Falkner is optimistic that the area will successfully adapt to all of the ongoing changes in business and become an example of how small towns can thrive economically in the modern world.

IT'S JUST A GREAT COMMUNITY. SO WHY NOT COME BACK AND DO SOMETHING GOOD TO GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY?



KYLE BATSON

Celebrating the old and new

BY KELLEN HOLTZMAN
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A pair of downtown mainstays have been celebrating major milestones and a new South Garnett street tenant is paying homage to the businesses of Henderson past while simultaneously establishing its own unique foothold on the local retail scene.

Last year marked the centennial for Gupton Services, which calls 134 Horner Street home. Around the corner, one of the most iconic names in town, in the one of the most recognizable five-story buildings, Vance Furniture turned 80, and will soon officially welcome Henderson native Heather Hodge's Nella Roo's boutique as its next-door neighbor.

Reconnecting with the past to form the future has been a theme around town and that is no

better reflected than the juxtaposition of Vance Furniture and Nella Roo's.

"I think it's time," Hodge said of the reemergence of downtown. "It's incredible for me to be here as a part of it and revitalizing this hundred-year old building and being a part of what that could look like for Henderson. There's so much potential here.

"Just look at the street. There's so many beautiful old buildings. They just need a little love. Don't we all just need a little love to make ourselves better? It's just a great community. So why not come back and do something good to give back to the community?"

continued ~

New kids on the block

Joining Nella Roo's on Henderson's main street in 2022 will be Flex Desk 360, a 100 S. Garnett Street venture by owners Nichole and William Turner that will provide office space to professionals in need of a more flexible workspace.

And who could forget The Dispatch, which settled into 420 S. Garnett Street in December 2021 after a remarkable 64-year run nearby on South Chestnut Street.

A boutique, office space, newspaper, and even a doctor's office: Granville-Vance Public Health Medical Director Shauna Guthrie's new Sunflower Direct Primary Care practice on Horner Street.

"It was important for me to open Sunflower Direct Primary Care in downtown Henderson to support local businesses and encourage growth," Dr. Guthrie said.

"I wanted to promote the area not just as a citizen but use my business to bring others to see what downtown Henderson can offer as it changes and grows."

There's certainly variety here.

The business runs in the blood for Hodge, a 2008 Northern Vance High School graduate, and a perfect representation of old school meeting new, having worked at former local favorite Interiors in high school and as a student at UNC. Her grandmother's local shop, Nell's Boutique, specialized in clothing and accessories while Interiors focused on the home goods side of things. The daughter of Pat and Dennis Hodge, Heather will offer both at Nella Roo's, which is slated to open in May.

"Bring a little bit of that back," Heather said, "but put my own modern, new spin on it."

100 years of service and counting

The spin Vance Furniture and Gupton Services have employed over the years is tried and true. It'd have to be to equal close to 200 combined years of service.

Both Vance Furniture and Gupton Services do business around the state, but they've also built loyal followings at home, and chosen to keep their offices local.

Generations of furniture-buyers have taken trips up and down Vance Furniture's elevator, transporting customers to showrooms that co-owners Craig Bailey and Sam Harper believe rival that of Triad furniture companies.

"We've had a lot of employees that have come through and gone and retired," Bailey said. "An awful lot of customers that we're thankful for every day. That's what the business is made of. We're still here."

That elevator, by the way, is still operational, although it rattles a little more than it used to after a few repair projects.

The Vance Furniture markings, painted on the broad and back sides of the brick structure in black and white, have long had their place in the cityscape, alongside the clocktower and downtown church spires.

Vance Furniture carries brand names that customers are familiar with; some of it even still American made, and they deliver anywhere in the country. Having their warehouse located behind the store makes the operation more convenient, and one Bailey and Harper have remained committed to; in Harper's case, well beyond retirement age.



THE VANCE FURNITURE BUILDING ON SOUTH GARNETT STREET HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE LANDMARKS IN TOWN FOR DECADES. LAST YEAR, THE VENERABLE VANCE FURNITURE CELEBRATED ITS 80TH ANNIVERSARY. THEIR SOUTH GARNETT STREET LOCATION FEATURES A NUMBER OF HISTORIC RELICS, INCLUDING THIS VINTAGE PHOTO.

KELLEN HOLTZMAN/DISPATCH STAFF

They don't want to give this line of work up unless they have to, and only then if it were to fall in the right hands.

"It's been a really interesting ride for all the years," Bailey said. "It's been a lot of fun, a lot of challenges, a lot of headaches — just like any kind of small business. You just keep working at it. It's something you love to do or you don't."

Greg Etheridge is still relatively new to Gupton Services, having signed on as president and owner in 2019, but he's a 1990 Vance Senior High graduate and understands the local landscape.

Like Vance Furniture, people outside of the Tri-County know the name Gupton, although they might still associate it with roofing, which now makes up just a small fraction of the company's services.

Servicing, repairing, installing, and maintaining HVAC systems, as well as building automation is the name of the game now for Gupton Services, which prides itself on being able to compete with big-city businesses.

Etheridge finds the people of Henderson and Vance County would prefer to keep their business here when possible. With Gupton Services, Vance Furniture and Nella Roo's, locals don't have to look far for them, and vice versa.

"I like being downtown," Etheridge said. "It keeps us connected."



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Maria Parham Health

KEEPING PACE WITH THE FUTURE

BY RAY GRONBERG

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In the hospital business, if you're not pushing forward, you're falling behind. And in keeping with that, Maria Parham Health has already made some additions to its offerings and staff in 2021 to improve its ability to serve the community.

One of them is a new, state-of-the-art GE LightSpeed VCT 64 slice CT scanner that hospital officials and practitioners believe is a major improvement on the 2005-vintage imager it replaced.

The new machine went into operation in January, following a three-week installation and calibration process and before that about a year of prep work with state regulators, Maria Parham's corporate overseers and with GE.

Used primarily in trauma treatment, it is both faster to scan and faster to process images than its predecessor.

"Say someone gets in a car accident," said Travis Thompson, the hospital's director of imaging. "The doctor wants a total-body CT on them, a head CT, chest and pelvis, to make sure they don't have any internal injuries. With this machine, we're able to do it a lot quicker.

"We can have somebody over here and scan them and have them back to the emergency room in 10 minutes," Thompson said. "The software in there is so advanced that while I'm taking them back, the machine is still processing their images. So when I come back, it's basically done. I've got about 800 images that I can send to the radiologist and he can go ahead and start looking at them."

The resulting images help doctors pinpoint injuries that might require a more detailed examination using the hospital's MRI machine, and they help doctors determine whether a trauma patient needs the additional technology and levels of care available at Duke University Hospital in Durham.

The machines are part of a radiology unit at Maria Parham that also has five conventional x-ray machines, a second CT scanner and a nuclear-medicine device that can detect injected isotopes that attach themselves to particular kinds of cancer tumors.



New resident

Another new arrival at the hospital is its first resident, Dr. Rashmi Saincher, who's on the Rural Training Track with Duke Family Medicine.

Residency is a key part of the training of new physicians once they've completed their four years of medical school. Saincher, who is from Canada, studied medicine at St. George's University in London and completed her clinicals at Jefferson University in Philadelphia.

A residency lasts for three years. Participants on the Rural Training Track train for a year in Durham at Duke University Hospital and Duke Regional Hospital, then go to work at Maria Parham and the Duke Primary Care clinic in Oxford.

There, residents will work in a variety of clinical disciplines as they progress through the program. Saincher's assignments mean that she will be seeing patients in the Labor & Delivery at Maria Parham, and at Duke Primary Care in Oxford.

"The advent of rural family medicine training in partnership with Duke sends a clear message of the commitment of Duke LifePoint Maria Parham's commitment to our mission of making communities healthier," Maria Parham CEO Bert Beard said. "We understand the importance of cultivating an appreciation for providing access to great care to all North Carolinians, especially in rural areas, and we know that access like this saves lives."

Finally, Maria Parham Physician Practices opened a new Women's Care clinic in Henderson in June of 2021. The location is the clinic's second, the first being in Oxford. The Henderson clinic is at 568 Ruin Creek Road, Suite 001.

It offers the same range of services as in the Oxford office — from teen visits, prenatal care and annual exams to minimally-invasive surgical procedures for an array of conditions.

Services also include routine checkups, general gynecological care, urinary incontinence treatment and menopausal management. Maria Parham Health will also be expanding women's care services to the Franklin County area, with another new location in Louisburg this year.

Beard said Maria Parham officials are "committed to expanding access to healthcare for women in all stages of life," and "excited to expand our footprint for OB-GYN services," he said.

HILLSIDE FARMS | A FORMER TOBACCO FARM, HILLSIDE'S OWNERS BUILT A CABIN ON THE 96-ACRE-OR-SO PROPERTY IN THE LATE 2000S FOR RENTING OUT.

A SIZE TO FIT ALL:

Venues in Vance County



BY RAY GRONBERG
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Hillside Farms

A former tobacco farm, Hillside's owners built a cabin on the 96-acre-or-so property in the late 2000s for renting out. From there, they added things like a shelter that have helped make the farm a popular destination for weddings, birthday parties, quinceañera celebrations and other family events.

Originally, "we built it with the intention of making it appeal for people to come out to the country from the Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill areas to spend a few nights in the country," said Ronald Bennett, the farm's owner and patriarch. "It went well."

Weddings remain the farm's bread-and-butter. For them, "we offer a package where they can come down on Thursday at noon and stay until Sunday at noon," said Lauren Bennett Roberson, who handles bookings. "The entire

Whether it's a wedding party or a concert or play, Vance County has a place to hold it that would be the envy of many larger communities.

And while some are as well-established as McGregor Hall or the Henderson Country Club, others are brand-new and waiting only for the final green light to start accepting bookings.

property [is theirs] to do as they please as long as it's legal, within the contract."

But as Hillside isn't a full-service wedding venue, families can hire their own choices for catering, photography and other services.

The pandemic forced a number of families to reschedule weddings originally planned for 2020 — three originally set for 2020 are still pending and will be held at the farm later this year — but it also encouraged the Bennetts to innovate by advertising the cabin on Airbnb.

It's proven popular with people coming to the area to visit family, with travelers passing through on long interstate journeys along the Eastern Seaboard, and with fishers and other people coming to the area to experience Kerr Lake.



The Aycock Rec Center — off Carey Chapel Road east of town, not to be confused with the new Adcock Auditorium in downtown Henderson — has a full-size gym, a swimming pool, a multipurpose room that can seat up to 275 people, and outdoor fields.

The gym is a popular venue for school and club sports, with Henderson Collegiate's championship-caliber high-school basketball team being perhaps the most prominent tenant. The pool also hosts school and club teams. Travel ball teams also use the center.

"We market to nonprofits, churches [and] families," and Aycock on several occasions has been rented out in its entirety so a group can use the pool, lobby, basketball court and multipurpose room for a single event, Henderson-Vance Recreation and Parks Director Kendrick Vann said.

The center hosts and caters to a "very diverse" group of clients, Vann said. And thanks to "appropriate pricing" set by Henderson's City Council, "somebody can give their kid a quality birthday party — without breaking the bank — with all the bells and whistles."

The Adcock Auditorium

at present offers seating for 662 people, and while it doesn't have the full gamut of technical and backstage facilities of 1,000-seat McGregor Hall, it's still going to be "a great place for a smaller concert or event," said Dr. Cindy Bennett, superintendent of the school system. System officials anticipate opening the books to rentals this spring, after the Vance school board approves policies on rates and other matters. They expect that some of the system's smaller schools — AdVance Academy and Vance Virtual Village Academy — will hold graduation ceremonies there and that some school choruses and bands will also join the list of early users. Add-ons like improved lighting and sound systems, along with the opening of additional seats in the auditorium's balcony, are on a longer-term to-do list that the system will pursue on timelines that depend among other things on the availability of funding.

McGregor Hall

meanwhile, has resumed programming following a couple years' worth of COVID-19-related disruptions. Vance Charter School and Oxford Prep held graduations there over the winter, and organizers have some gospel shows and a Henderson Rec Players performance booked for later in 2022.

The hall's managers took advantage of pandemic-imposed downtime to lower the orchestra pit to what they've termed a "more standard level," and install retractable acoustical curtains.



Going for a swim?

The school system and community college aren't the only public-sector venue operators in the area. Kerr Lake State Park operates the Satterwhite Point "glass house" and other community buildings, while Henderson-Vance Recreation and Parks Department offers rentals at the Aycokk Recreation Center and two shelters at Fox Pond Park.

Book it

If what a group needs is meeting or banquet space, there's no shortage of that, either. Vance-Granville Community College, and places like the Henderson Country Club and Kerr Lake Country Club have rooms available.

VGCC's flagship space and banquet hall is the on-campus Civic Center, but it's far from the only room on campus that groups can rent. People have, for example, rented out the student lounge for things like baby showers. The college will rent out seminar rooms and even the campus gazebo. When people call, campus officials try to match their needs to the available space, and accept rentals on a first-come, first-served basis, said Sita Makowske, the college's facilities coordinator for the Civic Center.

Bookings declined during the pandemic, but they've picked up again and the Civic Center has bookings lined up for almost every weekend up to 2023, Makowske said. The college will discount rents to nonprofit groups, and for governmental organizations rentals are "almost free depending on which room it is," Makowske said.

The Henderson Country Club has a ballroom and several smaller rooms available. The private club's members account for a lot of the bookings there, but it does rent to residents of Henderson, Oxford and the broader region who need space for things like wedding receptions or business retreats, said Dustin Perry, the club's assistant general manager. The club last year used marketing emails and a discount offer to attract business, but all in all it's "been doing pretty well" as the recovery from the pandemic continues, Perry said.

The 5,300 square-foot Pool Rock Plantation near Kerr Lake has no shortage of space either. Included on the property's 5.2 acres is a 3,700 square-foot reception/conference center with 1,200 square feet for a dance floor. The reception center has been used for Zumba classes, dance lessons, parties, and wedding receptions.

THE COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

fosters alliances among local organizations

BY DAVID IRVINE
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Three local organizations have joined forces to promote better linkages among Vance County businesses, organizations and governmental entities.

Triangle North Healthcare Foundation, the Henderson-Vance Chamber of Commerce and the Salvation Army of Henderson have formed "The Community Collaborative of Vance County" to help local organizations coordinate their services and activities.

The idea for The Collaborative was triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, said Val Short, executive director of Triangle North Healthcare Foundation.

The virus forced people to work from home, so they weren't able to network with others through the usual person-to-person interactions in the community. They needed a way to link up remotely, she said.

The Chamber of Commerce and Salvation Army boards were thinking along the same lines. Short got together with Michele Burgess, Chamber president, and Capt. Derrick Smith of the Salvation Army to set The Collaborative into motion.

It began in October 2020 when the three organizations hosted a Zoom meeting of community organizations to begin exploring opportunities to collaborate. Thirty-four people from 27 organizations participated in that first meeting, Short said.

That was just the beginning. Now The Collaborative meets on the last Tuesday of each month. Membership has grown to about 100 individuals, Short said, with the average Zoom attendance at around 30. "The list continues to grow."

Burgess said the response to the Zoom meetings has been "very positive."

A typical meeting may highlight an agency or profile a leader. Presenters have been representatives of local organizations. They share information about their groups' needs and resources, giving organizations with similar outlooks an opportunity to explore possible areas of collaboration.

New alliances have been formed, Burgess said, often among organizations that weren't aware of their mutual interests before The Collaborative brought them together.

These community organizations are really good at what they do, Smith said, but sometimes there is overlap, where multiple organizations are helping the same people. One group may not know what others are doing.

"We can serve better if we are all on the same page," he added.

Short used as an example The Collaborative's efforts to attack the problem of hunger, which affects a significant number of families in the county.

"A lot of organizations distribute food," she said, "but there's not a central location for information. It's mostly word-of-mouth."

The Foundation's website contains a link to food distribution sites. "That was a great find," she said. "Everybody was excited about that."

In addition to providing a means of connecting organizations, Zoom has proven to be an asset for organizations' internal operations during the pandemic. It can't replace face-to-face meetings, Short said, but it has allowed organizations such as hers to maintain operations. She said the Foundation board has not missed a meeting in spite of pandemic-inspired restrictions on face-to-face gatherings.

The monthly meetings may eventually transition to luncheon meetings. But for the present, Burgess said, Zoom seems to work best.



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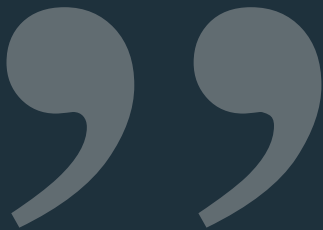
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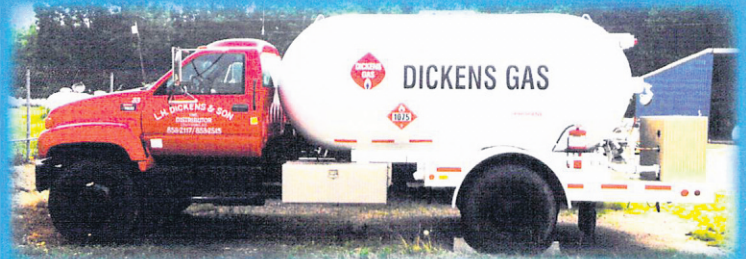
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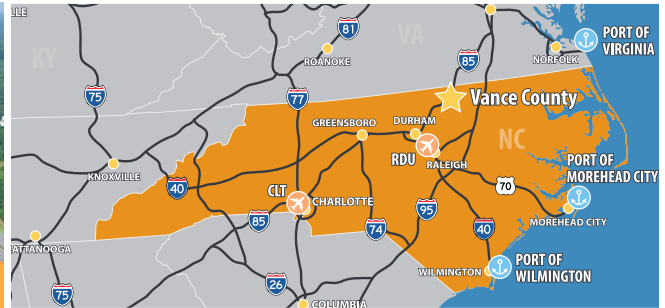
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