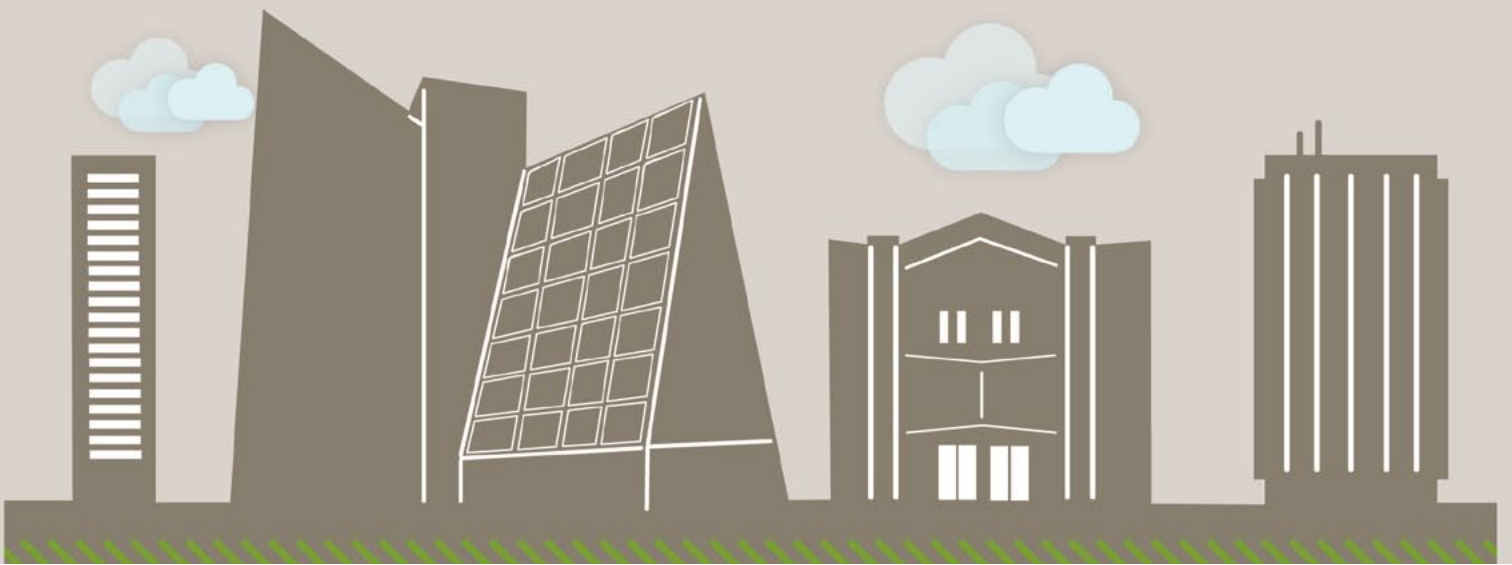


2011

Community Leadership Visit

Tupelo, Mississippi



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In the words of the Springfield delegation...

"Tupelo makes up for its size with the strong regional collaboration among three counties focused on economic development. It's all about creating jobs for future generations."

– Dave Roling, Emery Sapp & Sons, Inc.



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For each of the past 18 years, a delegation of Springfield business and community leaders has traveled to a peer city, to learn from the experiences of another community and to bring back ideas that will benefit the Springfield region. These visits have provided the opportunity to learn “best practices” from other areas, and have been the catalyst for many community improvement projects such as the Springfield Regional Economic Partnership, Community Focus: A Report on Springfield and Greene County, center city development, the new facilities of the Springfield-Branson National Airport, and the Facing Racism Institute.

On September 8-10, 2011, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce led a delegation of 52 community leaders to Tupelo, Mississippi. As we consider how to best position the Springfield region to compete in a global economy, community leaders hope the lessons learned from the Tupelo visit will serve as affirmation to reinforce the good things happening here as well as inspiration for continued progress. We hope the discussion will continue and include more voices in the coming months.

In the words of the
Springfield delegation...

“Tupelo leaders
were unapologetic
of their singular
focus on economic
development.”

– Dawn Hiles, Drury University

Introduction: The Tupelo Spirit

Tupelo, Mississippi is a very unique place. One of the first speakers to welcome our group of 52 community leaders from Springfield used the term “Tupelo spirit.” The Springfield delegation spent the next two days trying to identify the exact mix of ingredients that makes up the “Tupelo spirit.” It was a recipe we wanted to bring back home to Springfield.

As with any story of community success it begins with an understanding of the community’s history. For Tupelo, that history begins in the late 1800s when the farm to market town was the seat of the poorest county in the poorest state in the nation. One of Tupelo’s early advantages was its favorable location as a point of intersection for the railroads. City leaders built on that advantage and began encouraging industry to come to Tupelo. In 1934, Tupelo gained electricity from the new Tennessee Valley Authority and became known as the “First TVA City.”

Industry has continued to come to Tupelo, but through the years the type of industry there has changed dramatically. Cotton gave way to dairy farming and dairy gave way to textile manufacturing. Furniture manufacturing succeeded the textile industry and now Tupelo is in the process of economic transition once again. This time a \$1.3 billion Toyota assembly facility, which will begin production this year, is ushering the Tupelo region’s workforce into the era of advanced manufacturing.

So what is behind this history of timely and successful economic transitions? How does this relatively small town (with a population of about 35,000) accomplish so much that larger cities only dream about? That is what Springfield leaders wanted to find out and that’s why Tupelo was chosen as the site of the Chamber’s 2011 community leadership visit.

The first thing we encountered in Tupelo was a healthy dose of southern hospitality and genuine friendliness. And in talking to newcomers to the community we learned that this welcome mat is not just rolled out for

visiting groups from Missouri. They told us Tupelo is a welcoming community that is receptive to new people moving in and aggressive in getting new residents involved in civic activities. Tupelo leaders told us they use an ongoing process of “purposeful, planned inclusion” in order to get everyone engaged in community projects and initiatives. The second part of the Tupelo spirit is really a can-do attitude or sense of confidence that, as a community, they can accomplish great things that cities of 35,000 people aren’t supposed to be able to do.

What sets Tupelo apart, however, goes beyond the community’s enviable balance of humility and swagger. They have focus. They are intentional in their efforts. They always think about what’s best for future generations. And they have a plan. In fact, they have a legacy of strategic economic development planning that dates back to 1952 when the Community Development Foundation adopted the original “Tupelo Plan.” Since then the CDF has been convener and catalyst in implementing a succession of 10-year plans that guide the economic development of Lee County and the nine cities located within the county. These plans have provided the roadmap to lead the Tupelo area through the series of economic transitions they have experienced. Additionally, the inclusive planning process has laid the groundwork for effective collaboration between the numerous public and private organizations involved in turning the plans into reality.

Our host David Rumbarger, president and CEO of the CDF, summed up Tupelo’s determined and future-oriented mindset. “Economic development and community development is a marathon. It never ends. You just keep focusing on what’s on the horizon,” he said in his opening comments to our delegation.

Friendly, welcoming, confident, focused, forward-looking, collaborative and persistent: that’s the “Tupelo spirit” and it seems like a winning recipe.

Tupelo's Economic Development Focus



Tupelo's entire history has been a story of transitioning from one economy to another, as technology, markets, and times change. Throughout this turbulence, the Community Development Foundation has been at the forefront of ensuring that Tupelo is not left behind during these transitions and advocating for strategies that encourage economic growth in changing circumstances.

CDF fills many roles in the community – chamber of commerce, economic development corporation, planning agency, industrial developer, incubator manager, and many others – that keep Tupelo focused on growth. As a planning agency, CDF contracts with smaller cities in the region to provide professional planning staff, which intensely involves them in the day-to-day operations of their public sector partners, and as a developer, CDF has completed three large industrial parks. David Rumbarger, president

and CEO of CDF, explained this philosophy: "We're there when you need us, and we're there when you don't need us." Whatever is needed to make economic growth a reality, CDF does not shy away from filling any role and leading the community toward progress.

Part of the success in transitioning from one economy to the next is due to their laser focus on the fundamentals of economic development, beginning with CDF's original "Tupelo Plan" in 1952. As an example of this focus, their current 10-year strategic plan fits on one side of a piece of paper, but it teems with pro-growth actions. CDF knows who they are and what they want to do. Tellingly, they have even turned down certain projects that would have taken them off track from their strategic plan. Tupelo cares about real outcomes – economic development results – not about programs or outputs. Because of this defined focus on economic development, CDF is able to garner substantial private sec-

tor investment. Indeed, CDF has 11 members who invest \$50,000 annually; in contrast, Springfield Business Development Corporation has zero corporate members who invest at that level.

Concurrent with the economic changes, there have been many political changes during the decades since CDF was founded. Throughout those political cycles, CDF provided consistent and steady leadership in the community. This has been particularly important to keep Tupelo's laser focus intact and to ensure that sound economic development policies endure across multiple political cycles and administrations. As Shane Homan, CDF's senior vice president for economic development explained, "Economic development strategies must supersede and extend beyond politics." CDF keeps its eye on the horizon.

This focused plan for economic development centers on the needs of their targeted industries for business attraction, retention, and expansion efforts. Especially in the areas of land and facility development, CDF – through their planning and development functions – ensures that there is adequate developable land and infrastructure to accommodate the growth they are targeting. Additionally, they are focused on talent and workforce attraction, retention, and development for the specific skills needed by their targeted industries. Everything CDF does is directly connected to this strategic approach to economic development.

As another aspect of their strategy to adapt to changing economic conditions, CDF operates the Renasant Center for IDEAs, fostering "home grown" entrepreneurship and innovation in the community. Incuba-

tors exist to leverage small businesses, by providing affordable space, assisting with talent and idea development, and helping to connect them with other resources in the community. Even as they grow small-business innovation and entrepreneurship, Tupelo again demonstrates its disciplined focus and self-awareness. "We're never going to be like San Francisco," Homan said, "but we can cater to our own creative class and innovators."

Connecting entrepreneurs to the community and spinning companies out of the incubator has a direct positive impact on the local economy. For example, Pansy Bradley, an incubator tenant who started her own janitorial company, won a major contract to service the new Toyota plant. Through her connection to CDF and the Renasant Center for IDEAs, Bradley and CDF are building local entrepreneurial capacity in the community and growing the regional economy.

In the words of the Springfield delegation...

"Tupelo is smaller than Springfield, but you'd never know it. They do a great job in public/private partnerships. Their strong leadership in economic development has led to 11 corporate investors who invest \$50,000 annually."

- John Wanamaker, BKD, LLP

Talent Attraction & Workforce Training



Manufacturing Solutions Center

Tupelo understands the critical link between workforce development, their economic development efforts, and the community's overall health. That is why "the community college is at the table [on economic development] because the number one issue involved is workforce," according to Dr. David Cole, president of Itawamba Community College. To demonstrate this importance, ICC elevated workforce development to the college's cabinet level in order to ensure that it is on equal footing with other areas of the college.

A strong partnership between CDF, Itawamba Community College, and the private sector leads to customized training programs that reflect the current and future needs of the business

community. CDF serves as a bridge to the private sector, and they have a staff person dedicated to coordinating between education and workforce development institutions and the business community. Through this connectivity, relevant and timely training programs at ICC are being fully utilized by a variety of the region's employers.

Tupelo has a clear focus on the business community as the end user of labor and workforce programs. A "workforce development project manager" at ICC coordinates among all relevant agencies and institutions, creating a single point of contact for the companies and greater efficiency among workforce developers. As Dusty Lepper, plant human resources manager for Cooper Tire & Rubber Co. put it, "The business doesn't care where

workforce training funds come from. They just want to get the help." This community-wide workforce development project manager streamlines the entire process. Behind the scenes, there is also coordination among the higher education institutions, who work closely to avoid duplication of services and programs.

The Tupelo area's dedication to workforce development is also evident in their funding commitments. Locally, Itawamba Community College is the only community college in the state that receives the highest allowable millage (tax) rate. Statewide, nearly \$17 million in annual workforce training funds come from a portion of the state's unemployment trust fund. While this fund is relatively stable, there is concern that federal support for Mississippi's workforce training programs will be cut. To make up for this gap and to enhance the buy-in from the business community, approximately 20 percent of the costs of training programs are provided by the companies that use the services.

On an individual level, the Association for Excellence in Schools provides tuition guarantee programs for low-income residents, spearheaded by Tupelo's community development foundation, CREATE. Ultimately, their goal is to change the entire perception of the education system. According to Lewis Whitfield, senior vice president of the CREATE Foundation, this means that students are "not done with school until [they] finish two years at Itawamba Community College."

There are also serious challenges looming for Tupelo. The most pressing challenge is related to a generational shift in the workforce and associated "soft-skills" gaps in younger workers. Soft-skills include basic work ethic attributes, such as showing up to work on time, interpersonal communications, personal hygiene, and others. To address this, Tupelo requires soft-skill classes as part of their workforce training curriculum.

Other challenges relate to talent retention and matching the workforce's skills to the changing economy's needs, exacerbated by that generational shift and loss of the experienced employees' knowledge. Generally, Tupelo has found that lower skilled employees stay in the community, while higher skilled employees and younger workers are much more mobile. Adding the Toyota plant has provided local employment opportunities to keep them close to home, but it also helped create a "critical mass" of skilled labor positions in the community, which are also the same technical skills needed by the existing employers.

Related to the attraction of the Toyota plant, workforce competition and upward wage pressures were not as painful as initially feared by existing employers. Toyota has served as a catalyst to improve the community's entire workforce, and this competition encouraged many existing businesses to invest in their employees and to remain competitive for labor. This has improved the overall quality of labor, which will continue to encourage economic growth.

To meet these growing demands, Tupelo has increased its workforce training offerings. Itawamba Community College is currently renovating a massive former manufacturing facility into a responsive and innovative "Manufacturing Solutions Center." This training center is a partnership of four community colleges in the region, working closely with Toyota and other regional businesses to screen and train employees. For example, prior to their employment at Toyota, over 1,700 students went through WorkKeys tests at the center, helping to classify and train workers at a variety of skill levels.

Despite the generally beneficial pressures that Toyota placed on the workforce, some businesses still do not have a commitment to workforce education. Tupelo's leaders try to communicate the value of training employees and improving their skills, particularly because they understand the even greater pressures of rapidly changing economic conditions.

"ICC is at the table (on economic development) because the number one issue involved is workforce."

Dr. David Cole, President, ICC

Overcoming Negative Public Perceptions

“Mississippi doesn’t have the best reputation in the world and it’s earned every bit of it.”

Leland Speed, Executive Director, Mississippi Development Authority

What do you think of when someone says Mississippi? Is it a positive thought? For many, the mention of Mississippi conjures up images of racial violence in the 1960s, rural poverty and poor education rankings.

It’s not much different in the Ozarks, as the name of our region is often tagged with negative connotations ranging from barefoot hillbillies smoking corn cob pipes to the modern-day prevalence of meth labs in our part of the state.

Whether it’s *Mississippi Burning* or *Winter’s Bone*, movies and other media have contributed to the perception of backwardness that our respective areas continue to face. And even though they don’t match squarely with reality, perceptions do matter – especially in the world of economic development.

One of the things Springfield leaders wanted to learn in Mississippi was how the Tupelo area has worked to overcome the negative public perceptions about their state.

Leland Speed, executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority, cut to the chase. “Mississippi doesn’t have the best reputation in the world – and it’s earned every bit of it,” Speed said as he referenced some of the image

challenges confronting his state.

Speed suggested the best approach is to deal with reality and let the facts speak for themselves. “We’ve got to earn our way out of this, a step at a time,” he said. “We’re not going to overcome this thing through some PR program.”

In Tupelo, the concept of letting “actions speak louder than words” led Mayor Jack Reed Jr. to focus the city on simple, straightforward things that would address the core issues (the reality) that could eventually help change perceptions. Mayor Reed’s campaign platform called for a focus on jobs, safe neighborhoods, and a vision to make Tupelo a center for lifelong learning and the healthiest city in Mississippi. His administration has followed those campaign goals with concrete actions such as providing all new parents a book to read to their children, the “Mayor’s Marathon” walking initiative and “Tone Up Tupelo” weight loss competition. Another successful initiative has been the push to provide one shelf of healthy food options in Tupelo convenience stores, where many low-income residents shop for their daily food needs.

Reed has worked to engage the entire community in these initiatives, appointing Mayor’s Commissions to generate ideas and involvement, and providing leadership training for volunteers.

From a statewide perspective, Mississippi has the same “fix it” mentality as Tupelo. The state’s legal climate was one of the worst in the nation for businesses but a tort reform law passed in 2004 has added “fairness in the courtroom for everyone” to the MDA’s list of selling points on the state.

Overall, the strategy of economic developers at the state and local level seems to follow the theme of “building on your assets and playing to your strengths,” with the same type of focus Tupelo has successfully utilized. The MDA message emphasizes the state’s creative heritage of blues music, artists and writers, and connects it to the creative energy shown by the state’s innovators, inventors and entrepreneurs. The MDA helps local communities identify and build on their strengths by providing an asset mapping program that offers short and long-term recommendations for economic development improvements.

Again, Leland Speed’s advice is straightforward: “Focus on what we’ve got and quit worrying so damn much about what we don’t have.” Mississippi has a lot to build on, he added, as he talked about the high-tech manufacturing transition taking place in a state that now makes unmanned aerial vehicles and mega-yachts for the world’s rich and famous.

In many ways Mississippi’s drive to overcome negative public perceptions has made the state stronger. David Rumbarger of the Tupelo CDF thinks that is the case. He talked about situations in which a simple typographical error in an important letter is seen as a typo if the letter comes from another city, but if the same error shows up in a letter from Tupelo the reaction is much different. “Oh, they’re just dumb down there in Mississippi,” he said in imitating the reaction such a letter would receive outside of their region.

“You have to be conscious of the little things that reinforce the stereotype. It forces you to be better,” said Rumbarger.

“You have to be conscious of the little things that reinforce the stereotype. It forces you to be better.”

David Rumbarger, President/CEO, Community Development Foundation



The Toyota Story: Snapshot of a Successful Economic Partnership



How does a town of roughly 35,000 manage to secure a Toyota auto assembly plant that leads to \$1.3 billion in capital investment and nearly 2,000 jobs? The unlikely story of Tupelo garnering the much sought-after auto plant begins with a very deliberate, purposeful desire to create jobs for future generations.

Community leaders, and most notably the Community Development Foundation, began by working to educate elected officials and others on data that showed a significant loss of jobs in key industries that employed many of the area's citizens. As a result, support for the project was based on evidence that a transition to new industries was necessary.

A three-county regional alliance known as "PUL," which represented the counties of Pontotoc, Union and Lee, formed and agreed early on to work together. One of the earliest steps the PUL Alliance took was a congressional visit to Washington to get an existing roadway designated as an interstate, a primary qualification for the designation of "megasite."

Following extensive consultant feedback regarding what Toyota would be seeking in a site, the alliance began an intentional process of eliminating shortcomings, a process that continued over a period of several years. Soil, terrain, water, sewer,

railroads, utilities and transportation infrastructure were all addressed in order to methodically eliminate the risks of not being selected. (Before and after photos of the site are pictured above.)

Leaders also had the foresight to brand the site as "Wellspring," a decision they now credit as being a key tipping point in the process. Local elected officials could get behind and support the project because the concept of "Wellspring" was viewed as a region-wide economic development project that would benefit all rather than being tied to a specific community or county. In fact, all 15 county commissioners (five from each of the respective counties) voted in favor of investing \$13 million in the site prior to any guarantee that Toyota would select the Mississippi location. In total, state and local incentives amounted to \$324 million and of that, \$30 million was provided by local government primarily directed to infrastructure improvements.

Over a period of many years, community leaders repeatedly met with Toyota officials. Prior to each of the 16 visits, the philosophy was "Win the visit, win the project." Governor Haley Barbour became an influential and integral part of the project and many credit his leadership and involvement as another tipping point in gaining credibility with Toyota's leadership.

While David Rumbarger, president and CEO of CDF, talked of the importance of strong relationships with elected officials, he also acknowledged that their greatest challenge was the four-year election cycle which resulted in a continual mode of educating elected officials and working to build trust. In fact, he credits the level of trust among the various organizations, community leaders, and elected officials as the single most important ingredient that led to their success. "Having a currency of trust, you can't underestimate that," said Rumbarger.

In the end, the efforts that lasted nearly a decade have paid off. This November, the Toyota plant located at the Wellspring site will begin annually producing 150,000 of the world's best-selling car, the Toyota Corolla. And in addition to the initial investment, the region has already welcomed another wave of auto suppliers – bringing with them another 2,000 jobs and \$400 million in capital investment.

As for the region's existing employers, so far, they have been supportive as well. According to Dusty Lepper, plant human resources manager for Cooper Tire & Rubber Company, "We were very nervous but those fears haven't really come to fruition. The rising tide lifts all ships. We and other employers have to step up our game to remain competitive and retain talented employees."

Conclusion: Lessons Learned

The visit to Tupelo reinforced Springfield's strengths in several areas. In particular, Springfield enjoys a strong sense of collaboration and, as in Tupelo, that thread of collaboration can be found throughout the community. Given the size of our region as compared to Tupelo, we have a greater number and variety of stakeholders that must remain part of the conversation if we are to build on the collaboration that exists today.

In recent years, a community-wide discourse on the importance of being inclusive has led to the Facing Racism Institute and other initiatives. While we have made reasonable strides, much work remains. Tupelo seems to have learned the art of successfully welcoming newcomers to the community, most notably Japanese families who have arrived to work at the Toyota plant. Learning from Mississippi's ongoing efforts to overcome their own history, we can work to pave the way for continued progress in being a community that is more welcoming to all.

The in-depth look at Tupelo's approach to economic development provides the opportunity to examine our own approach. In many ways, the level of support from both the public and private sector towards economic development in Tupelo is in stark contrast to Springfield. In Tupelo, the importance of job creation for the next generation leads to the belief that the public sector must play a primary role in economic development. At the same time, Tupelo's level of private sector financial investment for economic development is significant. In comparison, we face the challenge of pervasive public opinion that often distrusts local government and the belief that it is not the responsibility of local government to delve into eco-



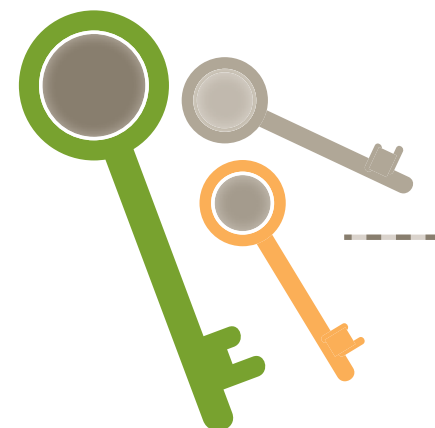
Mayor Jack Reed presents Chamber board chairman Jerry Harmison with a key to the city of Tupelo.

economic development. Locally, there is an opportunity for growth of private sector investment towards economic development – particularly among some of the area's largest employers.

Much like the Renasant Center for Ideas in Tupelo, the development of the "The eFactory" incubator at Missouri State University will foster the growth of entrepreneurs and small business startups. Currently under construction, the Robert W. Plaster Center for Free Enterprise and Business Development will provide the support necessary to further encourage entrepreneurs and innovators to choose Springfield as the place to invest and grow their business.

While Tupelo is a smaller community than Springfield, we share similar challenges and opportunities. Perhaps the most important similarity is that both of our communities face the rapidly changing demands of the 21st Century economy,

requiring focus and effort if we want to remain globally competitive. Tupelo's response to these challenges includes welcoming new people and new ideas to the community, supporting and investing in economic development, and encouraging home grown innovation, among many others. We have learned from their best practices, but precisely how we act and react to these challenges will determine Springfield's future economic prosperity.



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In the words of the Springfield delegation...

"The 'Tupelo Spirit' was a great combination of southern hospitality and a can-do attitude. Their long-term, 10-year strategic plan kept them focused even when others weren't supportive."

– Jerry Harmison, Harmison & Pearman, PC

"There was an impressive partnership between the public and private sector and they were singularly focused on continually growing and improving their local economy."

- John Oke-Thomas, Oke-Thomas + Associates

