

2015 COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP VISIT

HUNTSVILLE, AL





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Pivoting Toward Success

Springfield is a thriving community. Unemployment is low, we have a history of collaboration, and strong public education is a community staple. One of the best things about Springfield is the collective desire to keep improving. For over 20 years, the Community Leadership Visit has served as a mechanism for us to set the bar higher: to identify areas where we have challenges, define our strengths and work together to improve them. This year's 22nd annual Community Leadership Visit took a delegation of nearly 60 business, education and community leaders to Huntsville, Alabama to see what we could learn from "Rocket City."

When one first thinks of Alabama, one might think of football and sweet tea; not rockets and engineering. Although football and sweet tea are no doubt a part of Alabama culture, Huntsville has been bucking its sleepy, southern town stereotypes for many decades. Nestled upstate above the Tennessee River, Huntsville has been somewhat separated from the state's major cities of Montgomery and Mobile, both in geography and at times, ideology.

What started as a small settlement saw rapid growth because of the cotton industry. Following the end of the Second World War, Huntsville was considered for a federal wind-tunnel project that would have provided jobs to the local economy. Although Huntsville was ultimately unsuccessful in procuring the project, they received

a "consolation prize" that would go on to shape their destiny as a community.

That prize was the relocation of a team of German rocket scientists, including Dr. Wernher von Braun to the Huntsville area. These scientists helped transform Huntsville into a technology juggernaut. Their work led to the development of the rockets that launched America's first space satellite and the first series of moon missions. Huntsville's development and economy also have been driven by the presence of the Redstone Arsenal, established in 1941. The arsenal has helped shape the defense component of the economy and today is home to the Marshall Space Flight Center, NASA's field center for development. This establishment as a science, technology, defense and engineering hub has only grown over the years, helping to shape a city whose motto, as a result, has become "Huntsville: A Smart Place."

More than a saying, Huntsville truly is a smart place. Huntsville has more engineers and degreed professionals per capita than anywhere else in the United States and is home to the second largest research park in the country. Forbes magazine has ranked Huntsville among the top 10 smartest cities in the world. These impressive stats didn't happen by accident, nor did they happen overnight. A collaborative effort by elected officials, community leaders, and business leaders created an environment for a shared vision.



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Aggressive Economic Development

“It is less about charming a company and more about data points. We are selling what companies care about and not what we care about.”

Joe Ritch
Chairman
Tennessee Valley Authority
board of directors

Huntsville is unmistakably focused on growing jobs. In the last five years, its seven-county workforce region has seen a growth of 22,000 jobs. Huntsville is located in Madison County, where 9,000 new jobs have been added in just the last three years. Huntsville has opted to use a strategic regional approach, providing leverage when luring new businesses. There is a shared sense of celebration among leaders from cities and counties throughout the region for economic development projects, because of the recognition that a win for a neighboring community is a win for everyone. For some recent relocations, multiple counties and cities carried the weight of the incentive packages. “A relocation to a

neighboring city or county is a success we can all celebrate together because the entire region is going to feel the benefit,” said Tom Hill, president and CEO of the Limestone County Economic Development Association.

Huntsville is building the case for economic development based on data. In 2014, the Chamber commissioned an analysis of the workforce in order to quantify the availability of the “labor shed” to absorb additional jobs without impacting current employers. The conclusion was that the region could absorb an additional 10,000 to 12,000 jobs, data that was then used to attract new companies and garner regional support for growth. Additionally, they relied heavily on

data that showed the regional ROI from relocation projects since an employer draws from the workforce of the region, not just from the zip code of the facility. When referring to the region's job attraction efforts, Joe Ritch, chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority board of directors made the case for using data, stating "It is less about charming a company and more about data points. We are selling what companies care about and not what we care about."

Two major wins for the region were the relocation of Toyota Motor Manufacturing and Remington Arms Company. Both companies brought new manufacturing plants to the region, providing an influx of high wage jobs. "Toyota didn't just expand here by chance," said Melissa Elliott, HR Manager at Toyota. "Huntsville had all the resources we needed to operate successfully and not every city has that." The company has expanded five times since they arrived. What began as a 150 person operation has expanded to over 1,500 employees.

In 2014, the largest economic development announcement in the state was the relocation of Remington Arms Company. Their relocation occurred because of what the Alabama community could deliver: a high concentration of engineers, a community that embraced the company and its mission, right-to-work policies, collaboration within the various local and state partners and the diversity of the community.

One top resource for Huntsville and for the state is the Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT). The aim of AIDT is to help get a company up and running – from soft skills training to robotics technology training of a company's workforce. AIDT assists employers by identifying a talented applicant pool, assessing applicants through screening and assisting employers with applicant interviews.

Applicants who successfully complete AIDT job-specific training are recommended for employment. AIDT is commonly referred to as the state's "primary incentive tool" for job creation. In one instance, Toyota received 20,000 job applications for only 150 available jobs and AIDT was able to sort through and pre-screen applicants. Once they had narrowed the field and hired, AIDT provided in-depth training to prepare them for employment.

Employers see AIDT as an extension of their company, providing significant human resources support during the critical start-up phase. HR manager Elliott stated, "We could not have experienced this kind of growth without the partnerships we had at AIDT."

"We could not have experienced this kind of growth without the partnerships we had at AIDT."

Melissa Elliott
HR Manager
Toyota





A Hub for Science and Innovation

When NASA established the Marshall Space Flight Center in 1960, it ignited the imagination of community leaders and spurred further exploration as to what else could be achieved. With the arrival of Dr. Wernher von Braun and his team, Huntsville was poised to grow into a technology and innovation epicenter. Dr. von Braun was looking for a group of civic leaders to create jobs and establish a college to educate the new workforce in highly technical skills. Huntsville answered the call and established the University of Alabama-Huntsville, dubbed the “MIT of the South.”

Well ahead of their time, city officials in the mid-1950s had a vision for a research park that would eventually

host a conglomerate of new tech related businesses. Today, the Cummings Research Park is the payoff for that vision. The first of its kind in this country, the creation of the research park is credited with continuing to propel the community into a technology hub for aerospace, engineering, bioscience research, information technology, and telecommunications. With more than 300 companies and 25,000 employees, the Cummings Research Park is the second largest research park in the country and the fourth largest in the world. The collaboration between academia, public, and private sectors demonstrates the possibilities that exist when that much talent is working in concert.

Founded in 2008, HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology is now the cornerstone of Cummings Research Park and is working in four major areas: research-driven discovery, education, genomic medicine and entrepreneurship, making it one of the most unique areas for genomic discovery in the United States. This nonprofit institute is the latest evolution of the story of Huntsville’s role in science and innovation. History is repeating itself with the successful co-location of some of the world’s leaders in genomics with scientists, physicians, entrepreneurs and educators who share the goal of improving human health and life through genomic research.



“We put our money back into infrastructure. To me that is one of the most exciting things you can do. If you don’t invest in schools and roads, your community has nothing to grow on.”

Tommy Battle
Mayor
City of Huntsville

Investment in Infrastructure, Projects, and People

Transportation and education - key elements that communities want, need and require to survive and thrive. They are vital for generating economic growth, creating connectivity and developing the future workforce. They are crucial – and they require investment.

Transportation

Huntsville gets it. Recognizing the need for investing in infrastructure as well as the return on that investment, Huntsville has a plan championed by city leaders who understand that sound infrastructure is one of the city’s primary responsibilities. Community leaders were able to dedicate funds despite initial pushback and eventually Huntsville established a Capital Plan to invest in the existing infrastructure. The current plan dedicates \$70 million a year for the next five years

to infrastructure. For reference, this \$350 million over the next five years is nearly five times the size of Springfield’s proposed infrastructure investment.

“We put our money back into infrastructure. To me that is one of the most exciting things you can do. If you don’t invest in schools and roads, your community has nothing to grow on,” said Mayor Tommy Battle.

A long-term growth plan has been instrumental in recruiting employers to the region. When Polaris recently announced it would move to Huntsville and add 2,000 new positions, it referenced the community’s 10-year capital plan. Polaris saw a vision for its employees: they could rely on the fact that Huntsville leaders were dedicated to investing in roads and bridges, police and fire and schools. The Polaris team

knew that this commitment would lead to a positive investment for the company.

The Huntsville International Airport is home to the Port of Huntsville, developed in part as a response to meet the needs of the community as a growing science, space and rocket center. The Port of Huntsville is comprised of the Huntsville International Airport, the International Intermodal Center and the Jetplex Industrial Park. All have helped Huntsville become a player in the global transportation marketplace. The Port has had a tremendous impact on the economic development efforts of the region, and the airport grew as the region grew, with a vision for continuous expansion and significant investment to meet the growing demand.

“We were only superficially engaged in education. You have to be involved and engaged with school board elections as a Chamber.”

Dave Hargrove
Regional Director
AT&T Alabama

Education

Huntsville witnessed firsthand what can happen when a community takes its eye off the education “ball”, acknowledging the crucial relationship that must exist between education and the business community.

Less than five years ago, Huntsville City Schools faced what seemed like an insurmountable task: reigning in spending, cutting an over-inflated staff, paying down debt, and changing the prevailing culture. “We were \$20 million in debt and 1,000 people over staffed,” Huntsville City Board of Education member, Laurie McCaulley, said.

Dave Hargrove, regional director for AT&T Alabama stated, “We were only superficially engaged in education. You have to be involved and engaged with school board elections as a Chamber.” Once business leaders became engaged, they began to actively support candidates for school board and hold them accountable.

In need of a new direction, the Board of Education found Dr. Casey Wardynski, a retired Army colonel, to

lead the district. In 2012, under the direction of Wardynski, Huntsville City Schools became the first school district in the nation to implement a Digital 1:1 initiative across all grade levels, providing all students a school-issued laptop or iPad device. Most importantly, Wardynski helped turn the district around by implementing accountability measures, a more stringent hiring process and administrative staff reductions. He made sure conversations focused on student success. “You have to understand your city and its inspirations and determine how the schools can help shape the vision for the community. Nobody is moving a business to your area based on a great private school system,” Dr. Wardynski said.

Investment in infrastructure secures the literal and figurative foundations for growth. The message from Huntsville was clear: To ensure the community’s future, find the biggest return on investment and the greatest significance for the community, then prioritize investment based on what leads to job creation and workforce growth.



Cohesive Leadership, Shared Vision

“The key to a successful community is having elected officials put themselves and their issues out of the way to do what’s best for the community.”

Mike Gillespie
Former Chairman
Madison County Commission

Huntsville’s successes are built around many factors, but perhaps none more important than the shared vision of the community’s leaders. For decades, there have been examples of bold actions undertaken by Huntsville leaders that would benefit future generations. Often, those actions were seen as innovative and provocative, transforming the town into the vibrant urban area it is today.

“The key to a successful community is having elected officials put themselves and their issues out of the way to do what’s best for the community,” said Mike Gillespie, longtime former chairman of the Madison County Commission.

Some of the city’s top leaders repeatedly referenced the commitment to selfless service of elected officials, where community is more important than political careers and ambition. And while that is the norm in Huntsville, Gillespie also suggested they work around those who lose sight of the greater good. “If we have an elected official who is off track, we just go around them.”

City leaders past and present have taken major losses and turned them into building blocks for the future. Rather than spending time focused on failures and placing blame, they quickly pivoted to “plan B” which

often ended up being better than the original plan. “When you don’t win the top prize, you never know what’s just around the corner,” said Mayor Battle. Even amidst failures, leaders have managed to maintain community support, in part because of a commitment to quickly overcome and move beyond those failures.

“We’ve been able to do what we’ve done because we have embraced diversity, embraced key strategic priorities, and we have been very proactive in economic development.”

Hundley Batts
Former Chairman
Chamber of Commerce
of Huntsville/Madison County

A group of visionary and influential city leaders from the 1950s known as the Broad River Group established patterns of governance for Huntsville. Those expectations have provided the foundation for how Huntsville’s elected officials would lead then and now. The group’s philosophies included cohesive leadership,

willingness to embrace diversity, a visionary and entrepreneurial spirit, the ability to adapt and change quickly, all combined with a respect for the natural beauty of the area.

Notably, Huntsville has had a long history of embracing diversity, in part because it was a key to their economic success. This approach is in direct contrast to the ways other Alabama communities famously mishandled diversity and segregation. Huntsville was the first city in Alabama to allow integration of schools and hotels – a step that allowed it to recruit the best and brightest talent from all over the world. In fact, Huntsville continues to rely on “outsiders” to help build the economy and grow the workforce. Roughly 46 percent of Huntsville residents are from outside Alabama. They are proud of the diverse mix of people that call Huntsville home, and use it to their advantage.

“We’ve been able to do what we’ve done because we have embraced diversity, embraced key strategic priorities, and we have been very proactive in economic development.” said Hundley Batts, former chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville/Madison County. Indeed, Huntsville leaders have a history of showing the courage to make the right decisions at the right times, working together for the greater long term good of the community.

Conclusion

Huntsville has done a stellar job of leveraging and building on its existing assets. A history of rockets has given them a literal bang for their buck. But because of their willingness to embrace new ideas and new people, it doesn't stop there. Some of the greatest science minds landed in their lap, but the community has continued to expand on that for over 50 years. The presence of Dr. von Braun's team spun into Cummings Research Park, which then paved the way for HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology.

A common thread in all of Huntsville's successes has been visionary leadership that guided the community to new heights and navigated unanticipated roadblocks.

City leaders have created a vision for what they want to be today. An intentional focus on data to attract high wage and high skill jobs to the region has been paramount. And the presence of state-level sophisticated workforce training programs is an asset that makes relocation to the state attractive. Consequently, Huntsville has benefited from massive job growth in numerous industry sectors in recent years. Missouri would do well to explore more robust workforce development programs that model the success of the Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT).

To be certain, mistakes have been made along the way in Huntsville, but the response is what has been unique. As one tangible example, in 2008 the construction of a new Huntsville/Madison County Jail was more than \$40 million over budget and taxpayers were left to foot the bill. Although challenged, the community was able to navigate through what could have been a financial and public relations disaster. They took it one step further.

Huntsville, like Springfield, had a heavy judicial caseload and not enough personnel to address each case. As a partial solution, they have relied on retired judges to come back and assist.

As with past visits, we were reminded of our own assets. The near implosion of Huntsville's public school system reinforces the strength of our current school board and the importance of the business community's continued engagement with Springfield Public Schools. Springfield is also ahead of the curve when it comes to engagement with young professionals, our support for the vibrant entrepreneurial sector, and the redevelopment of our center city and the desire to incorporate an urban atmosphere into the community.

A common thread in all of Huntsville's successes has been visionary leadership that guided the community to new heights and navigated unanticipated roadblocks. Politics and personalities – these are inevitable challenges facing many communities



at the local level, in part because of national movements. This conflict of ideas and ideologies has the potential to threaten progress and growth; Huntsville is demonstrating how to lead in spite of conflict.

Senior Judge of the U.S. District Court C. Lynwood Smith, Jr., spoke to this current political condition. “The great threat to the American republic is the notion that compromise is a dirty word,” said Judge Smith. He went on to add that compromises are vital to positive results and that communities should invest in strong leaders who work to achieve important goals. For now, Huntsville seems to be led by elected officials who have managed not to get mired down in this political fragmentation, and have largely stayed focused on the important work of the city.

The Springfield delegation recognized that Huntsville leaders were quietly working on their challenges and problems, but publicly leading from a place of positivity, full of forward-

thinking optimism – one key to Huntsville’s underlying success. The Springfield delegation reflected on Huntsville’s ability to brand itself in a positive way and not just to outsiders. Everyone in Huntsville, from the mayor to the bellman, is able to tout Huntsville’s strengths. Perhaps a key takeaway for Springfield is taking a new look at how we talk about ourselves and what kind of self-perception we generate. Huntsville is an example of a science and engineering “chicken or egg” situation: Did the heavy science and engineering community attract the high wage jobs or was it the inverse? Either way, Huntsville is a smart place. A science place. An ambitious place. A manufacturing place. A thriving place. Their narrative reflects who they are.

What is Springfield’s narrative? Our trip to Huntsville left our delegation wrestling with this question. What do we want to be known for and how do we better tell our own story? Lessons learned will be part of the answer.

“The great threat to the American republic is the notion that compromise is a dirty word.”

C. Lynwood Smith, Jr.
Senior Judge
U.S. District Court

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“The opportunity to network with local business leaders while being exposed to best practices of another community led to meaningful discussions about how to capitalize on our community assets.”

Debbie Shantz Hart
Owner
Housing Plus, LLC
Chairman, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce

“I am grateful every chance I have to attend a Community Leadership Visit. I am reminded of what good we are doing in Springfield, and I am reminded of how many opportunities exist to advance our city and region. Most importantly, it is a chance for me to learn more from Springfield leaders about what we can do together to better our city. Because of a chance group dinner placement across from Nick Menke, Convoy of Hope, we began to talk about what our organizations can do together for Springfield. We will be starting a civic partnership that will come to life this spring, and our healthcare system would not have been part of this had it not been for this “chance” placement, fully orchestrated by our chamber of commerce.”

Steve Edwards
President and CEO
CoxHealth

“There were countless valuable takeaways from the Community Leadership Visit, but one in particular was the way Huntsville and the surrounding communities worked together to improve the region through joint programs and projects. The non-metropolitan communities would support projects for the Huntsville metropolitan area, even financially, because they believed the support of Huntsville was for the greater good of all involved.”

Krystal Russell
Owner
Payroll Vault