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Nash UNC Health Care embraces a culture of innovation and excellence, something that has guided our organization since its foundation. This approach has driven the innovation needed to adapt to the rapidly changing health care field and the diverse health needs of our community. In order to continually improve and better serve our region, Nash UNC has recommitted to improving quality, ensuring patient satisfaction and increasing operational efficiency.

Over the last five years, Nash UNC has implemented growth and innovation measures that have advanced our organization and improved the quality of services we provide our community. During this time, we constructed a new Emergency Department with a dedicated Pediatric Emergency Department, a new Heart Center, a state-of-the-art Women's Center and a comprehensive Cancer Center. Each of these recent investments, combined with prior investments in surgery, mental health, inpatient rehabilitation and more, helped us expand our service offerings to our community and improve our quality of care.

We are proud of several recent accomplishments that prove our commitment to quality improvement. The Bryant T. Aldridge Rehabilitation Center recently passed the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities Survey with a perfect score, an accomplishment received by less than 3% of rehabilitation centers in the nation. The American Heart Association, American College of Cardiology and American Stroke Association awarded Nash UNC with Gold



Nash UNC Health Care received top national recognitions for quality achievements in heart attack and stroke care.

Awards for the quality of treatment provided to heart attack and stroke patients. Additionally, the Danny Talbott Cancer Center is ranked among the top 5% of community cancer centers in the country.

With a renewed focus on the patient experience, we are seeing strong improvements in patient satisfaction scores, monitored through a standardized survey of patients' perspectives of hospital care. The Emergency Department, in particular, is seeing many patient service improvements, including a 1.65% Left-Without-Being-

Seen rate, which is better than the national benchmark. We are focused on improving wait times and have cut in half the door-to-provider time, which is now less than 30 minutes and better than the national benchmark. We are dedicated to providing the best possible experience for every patient, family member and visitor who enters our doors.

We are working to strengthen relationships with our physicians by seeking their expertise and feedback to shape our services so we can better address the health needs in our area. We are also committed to providing physicians with the resources, support, and positive environment needed to thrive in their profession.

Our senior leaders, board members, staff and physicians are regularly working in the community to build relationships and break down barriers to care. We will continue to offer community health education programs, seek community feedback and strengthen partnerships.

As an affiliate of UNC Health Care, we are leveraging the research, innovation, expertise and resources of a leading national health care system in order to improve operational efficiency and become better stewards of our community's resources.

As we look to the impending growth and economic development in this region, we plan to continue to invest in our organization and improve upon our services so that our families, friends and neighbors maintain access to superior quality health care right here in their own community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Lee Isley".

L. Lee Isley, Ph.D, FACHE
President and CEO
Nash UNC Health Care



The Rocky Mount Mills redevelopment is at the heart of ambitious plans meant to appeal to young entrepreneurs and workers in Nash and Edgecombe counties.

REGIONAL REPORT: NASH AND EDGECOMBE COUNTIES

EASTERN ECONOMY HEATS UP

From agriculture to industry development, the Nash-Edgecombe region dons many hats.

Endless fields of cotton and rich green tobacco epitomize Nash and Edgecombe counties, an agriculturally blessed coastal plain landscape an hour east of Raleigh.

Five years ago, farms and forest accounted for 24.8% of Nash's total economic input and 18.9% of its employment. In Edgecombe, a study by the N.C. Agriculture Development & Farmland Preservation Trust Fund found

REGIONAL REPORT: NASH AND EDGECOMBE COUNTIES

that 46% of its land is prime soil for agricultural production. About 3.8% of the county's 56,552 people list agriculture as their full-time job.

But Nash-Edgecombe is changing. Rocky Mount, straddling the county line, ranked eighth on a 2017 *Forbes* list of best small U.S. cities for cost of doing business. And industrial giants and young developers alike are betting on Nash-Edgecombe.

In 2017, Raleigh media company Capitol Broadcasting Co. purchased 200-year-old Rocky Mount Mills, a 50-acre former cotton mill including a factory and mill houses, to develop as retail, restaurants and residential units. LarGerKo LLC, a Durham-based real-estate investment company started by three young entrepreneurs, bought the May & Gorham Drug Store, built in 1904; the Alford Building; and the historic Carleton House restaurant and hotel in downtown Rocky Mount. They expect to reopen the hotel, with 60 rooms and four suites, in the second quarter of 2019.

And the \$48 million Rocky Mount Event Center, a 165,000-square-foot sports, entertainment and convention complex on 4 downtown acres, is scheduled to open this fall.

"Our native sons and daughters are moving back home to live and raise families, and they're starting to invest in their own companies," says John Jesso, downtown development manager of Rocky Mount.

International businesses also are moving in. China's Triangle Tyre is spending at least \$580 million on its car- and truck-tire manufacturing facility at Edgecombe's Kingsboro megasite. Nutkao Inc. of Italy, maker of hazelnut, cocoa and dark chocolate spreads, is increasing its Battleboro plant workforce. Belgium-based Poppies International Inc., India-based FarmTrac, Japan-based Keihin Corp.



The glossy new Rocky Mount Event Center is a sign of the region's rising prospects.

and Switzerland-based ABB Inc. also have settled in Nash-Edgecombe. Corning Inc. announced construction of an \$86 million warehouse and global distribution center adjacent to the Kingsboro site for its new glass-packaging product, Valor Glass.

"The most exciting thing about this is we have a real story to tell. I see the face of the Twin Counties changing," says Oppie Jordan, vice president of the Carolinas Gateway Partnership, the counties' economic development and recruitment agency. "We're having new success with a tremendous amount of advanced manufacturing."

Don Williams, chairman of the partnership, moved to Rocky Mount

in 1969 as co-founder and creative director of Lewis Advertising and has witnessed the transformation.

"When my wife and I moved to Rocky Mount from Richmond, there were eight tobacco warehouses and several very large international tobacco processing facilities in operation here," he says. "They are all gone now. During the last 50 years, the Rocky Mount area has worn a variety of different hats. Thanks to having such a strong base of international companies, we're now more aggressively targeting advanced manufacturing."

Norris Tolson, president and CEO of the partnership, says location was key to attracting Triangle Tyre Co., which Tolson calls the largest devel-

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opment in rural North Carolina history, along with the Corning distribution center. Together, the developments will bring about 1,000 jobs to Edgecombe.

“That’s a big deal,” says Edgecombe County Manager Eric Evans. “Considering we’ve had one of the top five unemployment rates in the state, we have the chance to change the complexion of that moving forward.”

The nucleus of both counties, Rocky Mount has the largest population, with a 2016 estimate of 55,466. Tarboro, the county seat of Edgecombe, has 10,994 and Nashville, county seat for Nash, has 5,528.

“Rocky Mount’s downtown has always been somewhat complex because it has the main railroad line for the East Coast running down the center of it, and those same tracks also serve as the separating line for Nash and Edgecombe

counties,” Williams says. “But I think everyone will agree these days that those railroad tracks truly have become the ties that are binding our region together. I also believe that thanks to the efforts of Capitol Broadcasting with its major investment in Rocky Mount Mills and the exciting redevelopment of the Rocky Mount downtown, you’re also going to see our population growth spurred on by what is happening both in the Triangle and in Greenville.”

Jesso’s vision is to create a downtown business, entertainment and residential destination.

“The 25- to 40-year-olds, investing in their own companies, will have a significant impact to the landscape in the next six months, 24 months, 60 months,” he says.

Prior to Rocky Mount, Jesse Gerstl, 35, a managing partner at LarGerKo,

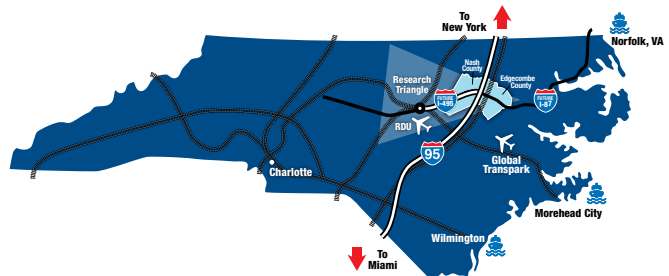
and his partners invested in housing in Durham, flipping residences and acquiring tenants.

“But we’re not buying these properties to flip,” he says. “We’re buying properties that people haven’t wanted, at a desirable amount, and waiting for the market to appreciate and create this sort of ecosystem of restaurants and activities for people downtown. I loved playing Monopoly as a kid, and now I’m putting hotels on my property.”

Rocky Mount Mills is a test case of what could happen.

“There are 67 single-family home rentals, and they are 100% leased out,” says Scott Roberts, general manager of Rocky Mount Mills, who says the majority of tenants are people moving into their first or second post-college home. Leases range from \$950 per month for a one-

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- Distribution



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ATTORNEYS AT LAW

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bedroom, one-bath home to \$1,550 for a three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath home. The 1915 mill houses retain their historical character but are modernized inside.

With tourism in mind, the Mills project is adding 20 tiny house hotel units that will be available for rent via major travel search engines this fall. "We're in essence creating a destination place itself, with Rocky Mount Mills," Roberts says.

The Mills complex borders the Tar River, which is the next development phase. "We are developing Goat Island, and that will [offer] public access with some level of hiking trails, fitness trails and several areas that are like sandy beaches," Roberts says. "We're working with a river outfitter to bring in rafting and canoeing."

Several breweries and restaurants account for retail space, and Nash Community College runs a brewing, distillation and fermentation degree program on-site.

The college opened classrooms at Rocky Mount Mills last year. "NCC has worked alongside Capitol Broadcasting and Rocky Mount Mills for the past few years to align our offerings with local efforts as part of the college's expanded hospitality curriculum," says Kelley Deal, NCC's dean of marketing.

NCC is providing other fields to connect residents to local jobs. The college broke ground last October on two buildings for advanced manufacturing and cosmetology. Both are slated to open this month. The 16,000-square-foot advanced manufacturing center will house instructional training for computer-integrated machining, electrical-systems technology, industrial-systems technology, welding technology and electronics-engineering technology programs in what NCC President Bill Carver calls a communitywide effort.

“Rocky Mount is an excellent halfway point along I-95 between New York and Florida,” says Barbara Green, executive director of Nash County Travel and Tourism. “Nash County has so much to offer with arts and entertainment, history and heritage, outdoor recreation, sports, family fun, festivals and celebrations.”

Like the Nash side, Edgecombe is seeing younger residents stay home to start jobs and families, with Edgecombe Community College, industry opportunities and lifestyle elements creating the package.

“Anyone who comes here and experiences our environment, our homes, our community-based initiatives, will see that this is a really cool place to be,” says Susan Freeman, executive director of the Tarboro Chamber of Commerce in Edgecombe County.

Adhering to Edgecombe’s catch phrase “Located on the edge of yesterday and tomorrow,” one innovation is combining agricultural roots with tourism.

The county has about 280 farms, creating opportunities for agritourism. “It’s a new component of Visit N.C. and the N.C. Department of Commerce. You allow the consumer to come in and see what a farm actually does,” Freeman says.

Her vision is similar to her Twin Counties neighbors’.

“I would like to see some new, independently driven restaurants that are unique little places to stop,” she says. “Also, anything that would help the chamber and tourism work with Princeville [the oldest U.S. town incorporated by African-Americans], that would be neat. Allow tourism to come and [for people to] know more about us.”


Edgecombe Community College in Tarboro partners with local businesses, including international firms

such as ABB, Keihin and Triangle Tyre, to train and retain a local workforce.

“My main focus in the customized training program is to be responsible for any training needs that businesses and industries in Edgecombe County might have, including those that are about to open up new facilities or expand their workforce,” says George Anderson, director of customized training and sustainability coordina-


tor at ECC. “I’m the point person for Triangle Tyre, and we’ve done some presentations for them, and they’re very interested. I want to see more than just Triangle Tyre’s 800 jobs with a salary of \$56,000. I want our residents to give themselves the best possibility of landing one of those jobs.”

Growth in the two counties also mandates attention to health care.



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NUTKAO SPREADS LOVE FROM ROCKY MOUNT

In some ways, the city of Govone in Italy's province of Cuneo resembles Nash and Edgecombe counties.

Nestled in the country's north-west corner, Cuneo is accessible to France to the west and Switzerland to the north. Govone's population is about 2,100.

"It is a small city, like Tarboro," says Davide Braidà, 45, owner of Nutkao Inc., which opened its first U.S. plant in Battleboro's Whitaker Business & Industry Center near Rocky Mount in 2015. "The quality of life is very similar because we are used to living in the countryside, and Rocky Mount is in the countryside, too."

When Braidà, who retains his home and company headquarters in Govone, was looking for an American location to expand his family's business, his decision wasn't based entirely on geographical similarities.

"To follow the business here, it was logistically the best location for us to put a plant in America. Rocky Mount is central between the North and the South, so it is easy to reach," Braidà says. "And it is near I-95 and the airport, so most of the deci-

sion was logistical." Locating in an existing building allowed the company to start operations more quickly.

Founded in 1982 by

Braidà's father, Giuseppe, Nutkao markets its hazelnut-butter spreads, cocoa-nut spreads, and milk- and dark-chocolate spreads to nearly a dozen countries. "We export about 400 metric tons per month," Braidà says, including shipments to Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Panama, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and much of Central America.

Nutkao joins companies from Canada, China, India, Japan and Switzerland with ties to the Nash-Edgecombe region. Braidà returns to Govone every month or so for work and to visit family.

Nutkao's startup in Rocky Mount was aided by a grant from the One North Carolina Fund and assistance from the N.C. Department of Commerce, Nash County, the city of Rocky Mount and Nash Community College. Its initial employee count of 22 has increased to about 30, and Braidà says the company soon could add four to five more workers.

The company has invested \$12 million to \$13 million in equipment, Braidà says. Nutkao does not plan to open a second U.S. location anytime soon, he says.

"At the moment the plant is occupied only at 50%, so we have room to add more machinery when necessary," he says.

Working with chocolate and nut spreads all day could have obvious advantages. But Braidà is all about business.

"I've been doing this 25 years," he says. "I'm used to it." ■

— Kathy Blake is a freelance writer based in eastern North Carolina.

Thirty-three counties, including Nash-Edgecombe, are participating in a health-needs assessment to be completed by year-end.

"I think we will see some of the same trends: access to primary care, behavioral health [substance misuse], diabetes, stroke, hypertension, obesity and cancer," says Stacy Jesso, chief development officer for Nash UNC Health Care and the head of the Nash UNC Health Care Foundation.

Hospital outreach aims to inform the urban and rural populations about ways to pursue a healthy lifestyle and the care available.

"We have health educators who work with the community and provide resources to partner organizations, individuals and families to help raise awareness of health issues," says L. Lee Isley, president and CEO of Nash UNC Health Care.

Nash is a nonprofit group of five hospitals, anchored by 280-bed Nash General Hospital, while Vidant Edgecombe Hospital in Tarboro is part of a multiservice, multilocation network affiliated with Greenville-based East Carolina University and its Brody School of Medicine.

"Nash UNC Health Care Foundation's priorities are the promotion of community health within the service area, health and medical programs that will support the uninsured or underinsured individuals within the hospital service area and educational programs that support professional health care careers," Jesso says.

The hospital opened its Danny Talbott Cancer Center in January, which offers patient education, lung-cancer and other screenings (about 90 new cases of lung cancer are diagnosed annually in Nash County), supportive therapies and other programs.

"In the last five years, we have constructed a new emergency de-



partment with a dedicated pediatric emergency department, a new heart center, a state-of-the-art women's center and a comprehensive cancer center," Isley says. "Each of these recent investments, combined with the prior investments in surgery, mental health, inpatient rehabilitation and more, allow us to serve the full spectrum of health care needs in our community."

In five years, community leaders agree, Nash-Edgecombe will be different.

"I see the balance of these two counties leveling off a lot," Evans says. "All you have to do is turn around, and you can catch a great glimpse of history here, whether it's downtown Tarboro with its historic district or downtown Rocky Mount with Booker T. Washington High School [closed in 1969] where Martin Luther King did his first version of his 'I Have a Dream' speech.

"Edgecombe is a place where you can reach out and grab hold of history, what it feels like and tastes like and smells like, but it's also on the verge of some pretty serious growth. People, more and more, are starting to see that."

Stacy and John Jesso moved to Rocky Mount two years ago from Charlotte.

"We were drawn to eastern North Carolina. The cost of living was an added bonus, particularly coming from Charlotte," Stacy says. "Our neighborhood is historic and beautiful. If you had asked me if I would leave Charlotte, I would have told you 'never in a million years. I love my Queen City.' Now I can honestly say, I don't think I will ever leave eastern N.C. We love it here. We are home." ■

— Kathy Blake is a freelance writer based in eastern North Carolina.



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