Greene County took a giant economic step forward this summer with the announcement that TEPPCO, a multi-billion-dollar petroleum pipeline company, is locating a facility in Boligee.

Phillis Belcher, executive director of the Greene County Industrial Development Board, gave much of the credit for getting TEPPCO to locate in Greene County to the resources AERN provides her office. “Having an Internet connection with which we could present information to TEPPCO officials about our workforce, county population statistics, land use, and retail activity was invaluable in selling them on the Boligee location,” Belcher said. “This information enabled us to present a detailed, accurate picture of the potential not only for the present but also for future growth in Greene County.”

“When the installation is complete, up to 10 direct jobs and as many as 60 indirect jobs will be added to the Greene County workforce,” Belcher said. She said TEPPCO signed a 60-year agreement to stay in Boligee and will operate on 80 acres of land being leased by the Greene County Industrial Development Board. “We could not have achieved this kind of long-term agreement without the resources provided by AERN,” Belcher said.

In addition to the local jobs, Greene County will receive funds from a tax abatement that has been granted to generate tax revenue for the county. TEPPCO decided to come to Greene County not only because of the ideal location of the two pipelines, but because they wanted to take on a project that involved a different type of market from their normal investments.

TEPPCO is one of the largest common carrier pipelines of refined petroleum products and liquefied petroleum gases in the United States, according to its website. The Boligee project will furnish barge transportation services to several TEPPCO customers connecting to Tennessee waterways. In addition to two tank barges and one tow boat TEPPCO Marine currently uses to supply these markets, four additional tank barges and two new tow boats are slated to serve new terminals when complete.

Additional growth opportunities for TEPPCO in the Boligee area will depend on increase in demand through the Tennessee terminals. The Boligee terminal will feature an interconnect with the Colonial Pipeline system and will be the primary origination point for products that will be delivered to the new Tennessee terminals in western Tennessee.

Not only is TEPPCO an oil carrier, it is also involved in almost all phases of crude oil gathering, transportation, and distribution.

TEPPCO will use the two different pipelines in the area. Colonial Pipeline and Plantation Pipeline. Both pipelines are located about two miles from TEPPCO’s work site. TEPPCO officials said their new business approach will not only increase their profits, but make their company much stronger and more competitive in the future as the company expands operations in its Southeast network.

Kara Smith

These are the fuel tanks that TEPPCO will be using for their production.

TEPPCO expansion, located on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. Barges will be loading fuel here.
Two new AERN centers held ribbon cuttings in east Alabama in June, bringing the total number of counties in the network to 14.

The first dedication took place on June 16, at the chamber of commerce office in Alexander City, in Tallapoosa County. Among the local business officials and city officials attending the ceremony were city officials, chamber officials and members, representatives of Congressman Mike Rogers, and member of the public.

Alexander City Chamber of Commerce President Marvin Waggoner described the event as “one more step” in the chamber’s efforts to develop local business. Mayor Barbara Young said, “We’re delighted that this effort has been initiated.”

The second dedication was held in Lanett, in Chambers County. Officials attending the ceremony included two members of the area’s state legislative delegation, the district director of Congressman Mike Rogers’s office; the mayor of Lanett; the Lanett city manager; the Valley city administrator, and members of the Chambers County Industrial Development Authority. The invocation was delivered by the Rev. Mike Densmore, who is a board member of the Greater Valley Chamber and the pastor of Fairfax United Methodist Church.

“People wanting to start their own business or industrial operation are often overwhelmed by all the questions and issues that have to be resolved before startup,” said Jody Elmore, president of the Greater Valley Area Chamber of Commerce (GVACC). In the past, she said, all her office could do was refer them to Auburn University. “Now,” she said, “we have excellent resources right here.”

Both centers now have resources for entrepreneurs within easy driving distances. The resources include a computer, printer, software, business reference books, and connections to the Internet. The resources are available without charge. All a person needs to do to gain access to them is to call in or come by for an appointment during business hours. At both centers, staff members are available to help users locate materials.

Grants to The University of Alabama from the U.S. Small Business Administration’s Portable Assistance program provided funds to open the centers, said Annette Watters, AERN co-director.

“The installation of this resource center is truly a milestone in the Valley Area Chamber’s development,” Chamber director Ms. Elinor Crowder said. “We are so grateful for the grant and for the guidance of the AERN team.”

Ms. Annette Watters and Mr. Paavo Hanninen, AERN co-directors, attended both open houses and gave welcoming remarks at both locations. “Small business ownership is the backbone of the U.S. economy,” Watters said. “It is an honor for the University to be able to play a small role in the business progress of these two counties.”

“We like our chances in Alexander City and Lanett,” Hanninen said. “They are vibrant cities.”

(Some of the material in this story was taken from accounts in the Alexander City Outlook and from the public relations office at GVACC. Used with permission.)
The Fayette Area Chamber of Commerce and Bevill State Community College were hosts for a workshop presented by the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network (AERN) for officials of Fayette, Pickens, and Marion counties held in Fayette on June 6.

“The purpose of the workshop,” said AERN co-director Paavo Hanninen, primary speaker at the workshop, “was to train community leaders in how to get the most out of AERN resources and plan ways to promote greater use of AERN resources and services throughout the network.”

Resources provided by AERN are growing steadily. They include a computer and printer at each partner site; connection to the Internet featuring http://aern.cba.ua.edu/, the redesigned AERN website that connects users to popular business websites, to Alabama Virtual Library and to other library resources; news about small business opportunities and success stories about small businesses; plus many, many books on topics ranging from financing a business to preparing a business plan, from starting a new business, to buying an existing business.

One of the most valuable resources is “Ask a Business Librarian,” which gives business owners a chance to go one on one with a business specialist at the University via the website.

Bevill State was a partner in the workshop because of its labor force and community development role. One of Bevill State’s purposes is to help communities promote entrepreneurship and home grown businesses. According to Alabama Gov. Bob Riley, small businesses are responsible for most of the new job creation in Alabama.

Karla Quesenberry and Thomas Burgett, Bevill officials representing Fayette, Pickens, and Marion counties, attended the workshop. “This workshop is just the beginning,” said Quesenberry. “We are developing plans through AERN to promote greater use of AERN resources and more capacity for AERN to offer training for entrepreneurs at the AERN centers.”

“These efforts are building toward creation of a workforce development plan that fully utilizes AERN and the AERN centers,” Burgett said. AERN and Bevill State are beginning a promising new partnership.

Others attending were Fayette mayor Ray Nelson, Fayette chamber director Anne Hamner, Guin mayor Phil Segraves, Guin chamber chairperson Stan Junkin, and UA business librarian Paul Brothers.

NiCarla Friend

Frisco City Convenience Store Thrives

In the small town of Frisco City, near Monroeville in Monroe County, the only thing worth more than a gallon of gas these days is the southern hospitality customers get when they stop at The Fillin’ Station.

With business planning assistance from AERN’s partner, the Monroeville Area Chamber of Commerce, the convenience store reopened in 2006 under the ownership of Scott and Robin Thames. It had been closed since 2004 because of severe damage from Hurricane Ivan.

What made Robin and her husband take the risk to re-open The Fillin’ Station? “Ivan came through and pretty much destroyed it. We waited for someone to rebuild it for the people around here, and that someone ended up being Scott and me,” says Robin Thames.

Although the Thameses tried to do a lot of the work themselves, there were still things they had to hire others to do. The roof and all the windows had to be replaced, so it took several months for all the renovations to be completed. Since reopening, business has soared and the inventory of
merchandise the store carries has increased. Even high gas prices haven’t deterred their customers from stopping by.

It is safe to say that people aren’t just coming back for the gasoline, soft drinks, and snack food, though. The Fillin’ Station is one of the few convenience stores that still operates as a full service station. Helping people pump their gas, wash their windshield, or even checking their oil is part of the job, says Scott Thames. While performing those tasks on vehicles, he is able to catch up on news about families or provide a listening ear. This personal contact makes his job more than just work. This connection with people is his lifeblood.

“We wanted to not only keep the store family friendly but continue to provide services, like pumping gas, that The Fillin’ Station offered before we took over.” The Fillin’ Station opens its doors at five a.m., six days a week.

AERN was a vital tool, said the Thames family, in both reopening and expanding the store’s business. Robin used the books provided by AERN to study the demographics of the surrounding areas, to make a business plan, and to make decisions about inventory. These references told her many thing about her potential customers.

From his reading in several sources, Scott said he learned about the kinds of personal services that customers want from a local convenience store, some things that would be different from the chains and big-box stores.

Sandy Smith, executive director of the Monroe Area Chamber of Commerce, is very pleased with the success The Fillin’ Station has had thus far and expects things to only get better for them. “It’s such a quaint little gas station and the people who go there really love it. Everyone has really shown their support since it opened back up again,” said Smith.

The Thameses rarely get any time to rest when they are working, and it has been that way ever since the store re-opened. “One afternoon we had finally finished all the renovations for the store and decided to open up just to see if anybody would come. We hadn’t been open very long before we had our first customer, and that customer still comes to the store every day,” said Robin Thames.

It didn’t take long for the Thameses to recognize little quirks in many of their customers. For example, one regular who comes every afternoon to get her gas pumped refuses to let the pump stop at $13 because of her superstitious nature.

Then there are others who come in and request the same thing every time. The words “two cans” might not mean much to you, but to Scott Thames that is all the information he needs to know that his regular customer wants two Grizzly Skoals in a red can.

Whether you’re a regular or just passing through, the Thameses will not only gas and service your car and provide you a snack for the road; they will also give you that special word of encouragement that could make your day.

Kara Smith

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