



# Building community



INAUGURAL IMPACT REPORT

what people are | *saying*

Somerset-Pulaski County now has a seat at the table in the conversation about Kentucky's economy, and our leadership is being noticed statewide.

"SPEDA has quickly emerged as a *leader* within the Kentucky Association for Economic Development, and more importantly within our Commonwealth. SPEDA's *collaborative, innovative, and holistic approach* to economic development is accelerating economy locally, with *meaningful impact* that proliferates across Kentucky."

**MATT TACKETT**

PRESIDENT & CEO,  
KENTUCKY ASSOCIATION  
OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



"Not only have they provided *needed leadership* on economic development and training in Somerset and Pulaski County, they are being *innovative* in their solutions to improve workforce development. As we see the opioid epidemic plague our Commonwealth, SPEDA has been *part of the solution* by creating a job training program for inmates."

**ASHLI WATTS**

PRESIDENT & CEO,  
KENTUCKY CHAMBER  
OF COMMERCE



"SOAR is extremely grateful for SPEDA and the work they are doing in the region. SPEDA has been key in proving why a *regional, holistic approach* to economic development is in all of our best interest across Eastern Kentucky. *And the best news is they are just getting started.*"

**COLBY HALL**

DIRECTOR, SHAPING OUR  
APPALACHIAN REGION (SOAR)



"One of the secrets to *economic development success* on a local level is to get everyone in the community on the same page. SPEDA has brought *Somerset-Pulaski County together* in a very short time frame to tell their unique authentic story *and the world is taking notice.*"

**BRAD THOMAS**

TOUCHSTONE ENERGY  
COOPERATIVES





# In Somerset-Pulaski County, we're not just laying bricks. We're building cathedrals.

Our mission, vision and values are at the core of every initiative we undertake at SPEDA. We believe unity and collaboration build a stronger economy. *We can accomplish so much more if we work together.*

## Mission

SPEDA is an aggressive, innovative and collaborative city-county partnership that leads the way in improving the **economic, political and social well-being** of its citizens. Using a proactive mindset, SPEDA utilizes industrial recruitment, retail and commercial development, tourism marketing and promotion, education, workforce development, arts and entertainment with overall community planning to improve **quality of life** in Somerset, Pulaski County and the Lake Cumberland region.

## Vision

SPEDA is a growth-oriented organization engaged in quality-of-life initiatives that leads the way in **business creation, expansion, retention and attraction**. Driven by **innovation, passion** and an **entrepreneurial approach**, SPEDA is a **leader** in economic development throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky.



SPEDA President + CEO Chris Girdler speaks to board members, Somerset City Council members and Pulaski County Fiscal Court representatives before breaking ground for SPEDA Commerce Park in fall 2020.



"What you're doing with SPEDA, *it's truly a visionary model.*"

**VIVEK SARIN**, FORMER SECRETARY, KENTUCKY CABINET FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

# ‘It’s not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are.’ — Roy Disney

Upon founding SPEDA, we identified key words we believe best reflect our organization’s goals and objectives. Using these words, we also established our core values. *SPEDA embraces these values wholeheartedly and uses them to direct the organization’s daily activities.*

**BOLD:** We take bold action in economic development, making a powerful statement that Somerset and Pulaski County is a place to do business. When naysayers suggest our vision is impossible, we will keep working. We didn’t say it would be easy, but the end result will be worth it. Though it may seem easier to quit, we will push forward, together.

**VIBRANT:** Our community is beautiful. It is full of vibrant, scenic views, but it’s also full of vibrant, unique people. Both of these make the experience here second-to-none.

**INNOVATIVE:** We constantly look for new strategies that will strengthen our community and its economic presence. We will be the easiest place to do business in America.

**GROWTH-ORIENTED:** We aspire to grow wisely and be modest in that growth, embracing an appropriate and effective growth strategy for Somerset-Pulaski County that make it the best place to live, work and play in the United States. One of our founding board members said it best: We don’t want to be the next New York City, but a “souped-up Mayberry” would be just fine.

**COLLABORATE:** We work together on initiatives that strengthen business development, and this is one of our most attractive characteristics to potential newcomers. SPEDA will always promote harmony and seek ways to bring the community together while vigorously pursuing a new economy rooted in quality of life.

**UNITED:** We not only work together, but we march together toward a common goal of making Somerset-Pulaski County the best it can be for our citizens and business community. We are a part of and a driving force behind something bigger than ourselves. We care about our community and our neighbors. We are laying bricks today that will build the cathedrals of tomorrow.

*There is a common thread among all of these words, a trait any community must have in order to represent them all. Somerset-Pulaski County is moving forward in economic development because of one major shift:*

**LEADERSHIP.** SPEDA is committed to being a driving force for embracing change that values our past, strengthens our present, and builds for our future.

## From the CEO

As a seventh generation Pulaski Countian, there is absolutely nowhere else in this world I would rather live, work, play, or raise my family than *right here in Somerset-Pulaski County, Kentucky.*

It is humbling to look back over the last two years since starting the SPEDA organization and see the amazing progress being made throughout our community. It is an absolute honor to lead SPEDA and be able to work with so many like-

minded individuals who want the very best for our community and believe in our future.

At SPEDA, we value our community's past, we want to strengthen our present as well as build for our future. Over the last two years we have been grateful to

work as a part of Somerset and Pulaski County's forward march. Through the pages of this report, you will see our holistic approach to economic development at work as we continue to "make business about people." This is only a snapshot of some the various collaborations and great things taking place throughout our community and region. It is a reflection of the core values we

adopted upon our founding, which represent SPEDA's goals and objectives. We embrace these value words wholeheartedly — **bold, vibrant, innovative, growth-oriented, collaborate, united** and **leadership** — and use them to direct our organization's daily activities. If you did not read about these values on the previous page, I encourage you to do so as they truly explain why and how we do what we do.

We have made great progress and while we believe it is important to celebrate our community's success, we use it as encouragement to continue our work and follow our plan. In Somerset and Pulaski County, we are not just laying bricks, we are building cathedrals. **At SPEDA, we are making business about people.** We have been deservedly recognized as a redefining movement that is improving and shaping our community for many years of success.

Thank you for the opportunity to lead the SPEDA organization and may we always look for ways in which to work together to help our community reach its full potential. Let us always be the best version of ourselves and live by Kentucky's state motto, "United we stand, divided we fall." We are going to do great things together.



**Chris Girdler**  
President + CEO

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Girdler'.

▶ **Let us always be the best version of ourselves and live by Kentucky's state motto, 'United we stand, divided we fall.' We are going to do great things together.**

## From the Chairman

I have had the honor of serving as the chairman of the SPEDA Board since its inception. When the idea of SPEDA was first discussed, so many within the community knew it was something we needed and would have the potential of *changing the economic development landscape of our community forever*.



SPEDA's first board retreat in fall 2020.

However, I do not believe anyone — including myself — had any idea what a tremendous positive impact SPEDA would have in such a short period of time.

It has been said that to do things that haven't been done before, you have to do things that haven't been done before. SPEDA has achieved outcomes that no one thought possible and many may have doubted.

SPEDA has, in short order, turned the old economic development model upside down. Long gone are the days of stagnant efforts that left the community wondering what was happening. SPEDA has re-imagined economic development and taken a holistic approach that aims to improve the overall quality of life for all of our residents.

Quite frankly, the model has exceeded our expectations and the results speak for themselves.

As you read through this report, I would ask you to reflect on our impact but also join us looking into the future. One of SPEDA's core values is collaboration. It will take all of us working together to accomplish our goals.

Let's keep moving our community forward together!



**Brook Ping**  
Board Chairman

Handwritten signature of Brook Ping.



## Accomplishments

# SPEDA wins national communications award

SPEDA's efforts to broaden and strengthen communication about economic development in Somerset-Pulaski County was recognized in 2020 with an award from the oldest and largest economic development association in North America.

The Southern Economic Development Council (SEDC) presented SPEDA with a Special Judges' Award for Comprehensive Communications Effort for a campaign celebrating the organization's one-year anniversary. The campaign spanned the month of February 2020 and included a social media strategy designed to highlight all of SPEDA's accomplishments during its first year, in addition to a weekly email marketing campaign, a print marketing

piece and advertisements in local and statewide publications.

"At SPEDA we believe wholeheartedly in the power of good communication, whether that be internal or external," SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler said. "It is a pillar of community advancement and success. We look forward to continuing to work with SEDC and so many other partners telling our story of the great things happening in Somerset, Pulaski County and the Lake Cumberland region of southeast Kentucky."

SEDC, a non-profit membership organization, has members in 17 states in the American South.



*From left, SPEDA Chief Accounting Officer Jessica Carlton, Communications Consultant Julie Nelson Harris, and President and CEO Chris Girdler with the SEDC award.*

## Leading the way

### SPEDA STAFF & BOARD

Former Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin appointed SPEDA President and CEO **Chris Girdler** to the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) Board of Regents in 2019. Girdler's term will expire July 21, 2025.

Founding board member **Michelle Allen** was selected for the 2020 class of Leadership Kentucky, while founding board member and Somerset Mayor **Alan Keck** was named to the organization's board of directors. Keck is a



**Girdler**



**Allen**



**Keck**

graduate of the Leadership Kentucky Class of 2017.

Outgoing board member **Cody Gibson** was selected for the inaugural BRIGHT Kentucky class in 2019, which helps innovate, collaborate and advance community and economic development in Appalachian Kentucky.

After having organized the program for many years while working for the Somerset-



**Gibson**



**Carlton**

Pulaski Chamber of Commerce, SPEDA Chief Accounting Officer **Jessica Carlton** was selected to participate as a member of the Leadership Lake Cumberland class of 2020.

Incoming board member and Thoroughbred Hospitality Group President and CEO **Ameet Patel** received the Somerset Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce 2020 Rising Star Award for his hard work, service and dedication to his clients and his community.



**Patel**

**‘A leader is one who knows the way,  
goes the way and shows the way.’** — John C. Maxwell

## *board of directors*



**Brook Ping**

Chairman  
Developer



**Michelle Allen**

Vice Chair  
Director, Somerset-  
Pulaski County CVB



**Seth Atwell**

Treasurer  
Partner, EHA CPAs



**Forrest Spillman**

Founding Member  
Educator, Somerset  
High School



**Steve Kelley**

Founding Member  
Pulaski County  
Judge-Executive



**Alan Keck**

Founding Member  
Mayor, City  
of Somerset



**Jeremy Bartley**

Legal Counsel  
Attorney, Law Office of  
Jeremy A. Bartley, PSC



**Ameet Patel**

Member  
President & CEO,  
Thoroughbred  
Hospitality Group



**Tina Hamm**

Member  
Co-Founder & CFO,  
Phoenix Preferred  
Care

## *staff*



**Chris Girdler**

President & CEO



**Jessica Carlton**

Chief Accounting  
Officer





# Two accomplished business leaders join SPEDA's board

The co-founder of a storied behavioral health services center and the president and CEO of a growing hospitality group *are SPEDA's newest board members.*

Appointed to a four-year term by Pulaski County Judge-Executive Steve Kelley, **Tina Hamm** is the co-founder of Phoenix Preferred Care, which has provided behavioral health services to Pulaski County's children and families for more than 20 years. There, she serves as CFO as well as a licensed professional clinical counselor supervisor (LPCC-S). As such, she educates clinicians, consults for programs across the state, and oversees more than 40 employees who provide services to nearly 1,100 children annually at home, school, in the community and via telehealth.

Tina received her master's degree in education with an emphasis in mental health counseling from Western Kentucky University in 2005. She received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Eastern Kentucky University in 1997.

Tina is past president of Somerset-Pulaski Morning Rotary and continues to be an active member. She is a member of the Association for Play Therapy, Kentucky Association for Play Therapy and the Kentucky Counseling Association. Along with husband, Mark, she is a lifelong resident of Pulaski County. She has

two daughters, Zoey and Lily, who are pursuing their post-secondary education.

Appointed by Somerset Mayor Alan Keck to fill a two-year vacancy, **Ameet Patel** was born in Bowling Green, but has called Somerset and Pulaski County home for the past 22 years. A graduate of Southwestern High School and the University of Kentucky, Ameet holds degrees in accounting, finance, and management.

After joining one of the nation's largest public accounting firms during his senior year, Ameet decided to return to Somerset and help his parents retire after 45 years in the hospitality industry. He has since used his family business as a platform for expansion by forming Thoroughbred Hospitality Group, which operates hotels in Somerset, Louisville, Georgetown, Lexington, Danville and Columbia.

Ameet has also served on the UK College of Business and Economics Emerging Leaders Board and Choice Hotels International Rising Stars Board. He is the son of Arvind and Hansa Patel, has three older sisters, and recently married his college sweetheart, Jessica.

## Showing appreciation

### RON PFAFF & CODY GIBSON

SPEDA recently recognized outgoing founding board members **Ron Pfaff** (below) and **Cody Gibson** (bottom photo) with plaques for their service to the SPEDA board. Their hard work and dedication were crucial to launching the SPEDA organization and for that, we extend our greatest appreciation and gratitude.



# \$300K

saved annually through expense evaluation,  
cost-saving measures and best practices



**The Capital of Lake Cumberland**  
*somerset-pulaski county | kentucky*



## A seat at the table

Statewide publications like the *The Lane Report* and *Kentucky Monthly* have recognized the great work SPEDA is doing and have given Somerset-Pulaski County a voice across the Commonwealth on topics related to quality of life and economic development.

## FIRST EDA IN KENTUCKY

to launch a 501c3 to raise money for community projects  
*More than \$75K raised in first six months*

TO HELP IN DIFFICULT ECONOMIC CLIMATE, SPEDA PLEDGED

# \$360K

FOR FIRST-YEAR BOND PAYMENT ON KY. 80-461 PROJECT AND VOLUNTARILY REQUESTED BUDGET CUT

## 2 CLEAN AUDITS

SPEDA's financial health is strong

SPEDA received two clean financial audits for its first two years in operation, independent examinations that were not required by law but instead pursued voluntarily by the organization.

Conducted by the London office of Cloyd & Associates PSC, the final audit reports for fiscal years 2019 and 2020 give a clean opinion. Auditors complimented SPEDA's staff on record-keeping and the organization's board members for proper oversight and separation of duties.

Board members unanimously voted to conduct annual audits in the interest of transparency, though they are not required.





# Recruitment

We've gotten off on the right foot in recruiting business and industry in our first two years. Hundreds of millions are being invested and hundreds of jobs created. *Our model is working.*





### Horse Soldier's design and construction team

D.W. Wilburn (construction, Kentucky)

EOP (architecture, Kentucky)

VITOK (engineering, Kentucky)

Carman (landscape, Kentucky)

Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (architecture, London, England)

BRC Imagination Arts (experiential design, California)

**Experience:** Designing/building the world-renowned McCallan Distillery in Scotland, World Tower 3 in New York City, the U.S. Spy Museum, The Jameson and Absolut brand-homes and guest experiences in Europe, and extensive Kentucky distillery construction expertise.

## H O R S E   S O L D I E R   B O U R B O N

# Somerset-Pulaski County's first bourbon distillery

On a 227-acre expanse of rolling hills, Horse Soldier Bourbon will build its multi-million dollar distillery *at Waitsboro Hills overlooking Lake Cumberland.*

An American bourbon distillery founded by members of the first U.S. Army Special Forces unit to enter Afghanistan following the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks announced in December 2019 it will expand in Somerset, launching a two-phase, multi-million dollar project.

The founders of Horse Soldier Bourbon selected one of Pulaski County's most scenic properties, a

227-acre expanse of rolling hills overlooking Lake Cumberland, to be the distillery's home.

Ground is expected to be broken in 2021 for the project, which will pay dividends in long-term job creation, bolster an already thriving tourism industry, enhance quality of life and place, and will put Somerset on the map for worldwide travelers visiting the Kentucky Bourbon Trail.

### T E A M M O D E R N

# Multi-million dollar expansion complete

Team Modern purchased the former Safe Auto building at Valley Oak Technology Complex for its headquarters and built a 115,000-square-foot distribution center. *This investment increases capacity for the company's growing food service business and will add 20 to 40 jobs.*

A multi-million dollar expansion for one of Pulaski County's most storied businesses is complete at the Valley Oak Technology Complex.

Team Modern, owned and operated by the Ray family, purchased the former Safe Auto office building on Valley Oak Drive late last year and built a 115,000-square-foot distribution center on 70 acres adjacent to the building to serve its distribution division. The distribution center will increase Team Modern's freezer/cooler capacity for its growing food service business and will allow product movement and sortation to be automated.

The new facility will allow Team Modern to maintain its more than 200 current jobs and provide a platform to add 20 to 40 jobs in the future.

"It's a good problem to have, but we have completely outgrown our current facility," Team Modern Chief Financial Officer Michael Ray said. "We knew we could not continue to grow and service our customers with our current real estate. Our growth and our food service focus demanded that we find new space, and we have been very blessed that this project fell together to allow us to do that."



From left, Somerset Mayor Alan Keck, Team Modern owners Mickey Ray, Jerry Ray and Michael Ray, Somerset-Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Bobby Clue and SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler during a tour of the facility.



### K E N T U C K Y   A R M Y   N A T I O N A L   G U A R D

# Readiness center will be SPEDA Commerce Park's first tenant

The Kentucky National Guard signed a memorandum of understanding in August 2020 announcing its intention *to build a regional readiness center and field maintenance shop at the new SPEDA Commerce Park.*

The Kentucky National Guard is the park's first official tenant. In exchange for the 18 acres where the facility will be built, the Department of Military Affairs will transfer ownership of the 20,000-square-foot Armory building on Grande Avenue in downtown



At a ceremonial signing in August 2020, from left, Joe Sanderson, Cody Gibson, SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler, Pulaski County Judge-Executive Steve Kelley, Brig. Gen. Haldane B. Lamberton, Somerset Mayor Alan Keck, Sam Ruth, Charles Bush and Scott Aubrey.

Somerset, as well as a 3,400-square-foot storage building, to SPEDA.

The announcement fulfills a long-term construction goal for the Kentucky National Guard. Adjutant General of Kentucky Brig. Gen. Haldane B. Lamberton has put a high priority on building a new center in the Pulaski County area as well as a new field maintenance shop.

"Through nearly 75 years of service, our existing structures in Pulaski and Laurel counties have served us well. But as the facilities have aged, the Guard has outgrown the outdated structures," Brig. Gen. Lamberton said. "We look forward to this new chapter at the regional SPEDA Commerce Park, the expanded capacity it will offer the Guard and the continued partnership with the Somerset-Pulaski community."



H O L L A E N D E R M A N U F A C T U R I N G C O .

# Handrail company expands to Somerset

In its first expansion outside the Cincinnati market, Hollaender Manufacturing commits to *\$667,000 investment in Somerset-Pulaski County and up to 16 full-time jobs.*

After more than a year in their new Somerset-Pulaski County location, Hollaender Manufacturing executives are proud of the progress they've made through expansion — and excited about what the future holds.

The Cincinnati handrail company announced in October 2019 it would open a manufacturing operation in a 12,000-square-foot warehouse on University Drive in Somerset, its first expansion outside the Cincinnati market.

In operation since 1946, Hollaender's pipe fittings and handrail systems can be found around the world, from rocket launch pads at Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral to offshore oil rigs, from U.S. Army Corps locks and dams to amusement parks like Kings Island, Six Flags and Disney World — even at Hollywood movie studios. Hollaender components are used in the design and build of handrail, guardrail and safety rail systems as well as a variety of unique modular pipe and fitting based structures



From left, SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler, Pulaski County Judge-Executive Steve Kelley, Somerset Mayor Alan Keck, Plant Manager Greg Broyles, and Hollaender President and COO Marc Cetrulo during a tour of the company's warehouse facility.

for commercial, residential, public works and industrial applications.

Specifically, Hollaender manufactures its line of Speed-Rail® mechanical fittings at its Somerset warehouse. The company's initial \$667,000 investment in Somerset-

Pulaski County was expected to create up to 16 full-time jobs and cover the cost of equipment needed to meet production requirements. But after the success of their first year, Hollaender executives are considering another expansion of jobs and equipment in the near future.

## Recruitment

### A H F P R O D U C T S

## Flooring company invests \$2.5 million on new line, creates 20 full-time jobs

To pioneer a new line of highly durable end-grain hardwood flooring, AHF Products committed to investing \$2.5 million and create 20 full-time jobs at its Somerset-Pulaski County facility in 2021.

AHF Products, with decades of experience in wood flooring design and innovation, developed new technology for a first-of-its-kind category of hardwood flooring. The new product targets consumers who prefer hardwood flooring for its natural beauty, longevity and the value it provides to the home, but are seeking a strong performance product to stand up to pets, children and heavy foot traffic.

AHF leaders opted to manufacture the new line in Somerset versus their facility elsewhere, in large part because of the commonwealth's highly skilled workforce and the company's strong commitment to U.S. manufacturing and American craftsmanship. In addition to creating 20 jobs at the plant, the new product line also helps secure the facility's viability and its current 145 jobs as the market shifts from the rotary engineered hardwood flooring currently made at the plant.

### B L A C K B E L T H E L P

## Student services company opens Somerset facility

Chicago's BlackBeltHelp opened a contact center in Somerset at the end of 2019, *hiring an immediate 15 positions with the expectation of adding more over time.*



Back row, from left, Somerset Mayor Alan Keck, SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler, Cumberland's Workforce Center Business Services Team Member Shirlene Taylor, Somerset-Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Bobby Clue and Pulaski County Judge-Executive Steve Kelley. Front row, from left, Shruti Gupta, senior manager of BlackBeltHelp, and Joe Quigley, associate vice president of U.S. operations.

Formed in 2012, BlackBeltHelp provides student services contact center technology 24 hours a day, seven days a week for students, faculty and staff of higher education institutions.

BlackBeltHelp solutions reduce administrative burdens and improve operational efficiencies while expanding access and reducing institutional costs. This is enabled by an AI-powered cloud-based platform offering integrated voice, chat, ticket, email and bot technology.

The company supports 4 million students annually and has more than 200 clients.





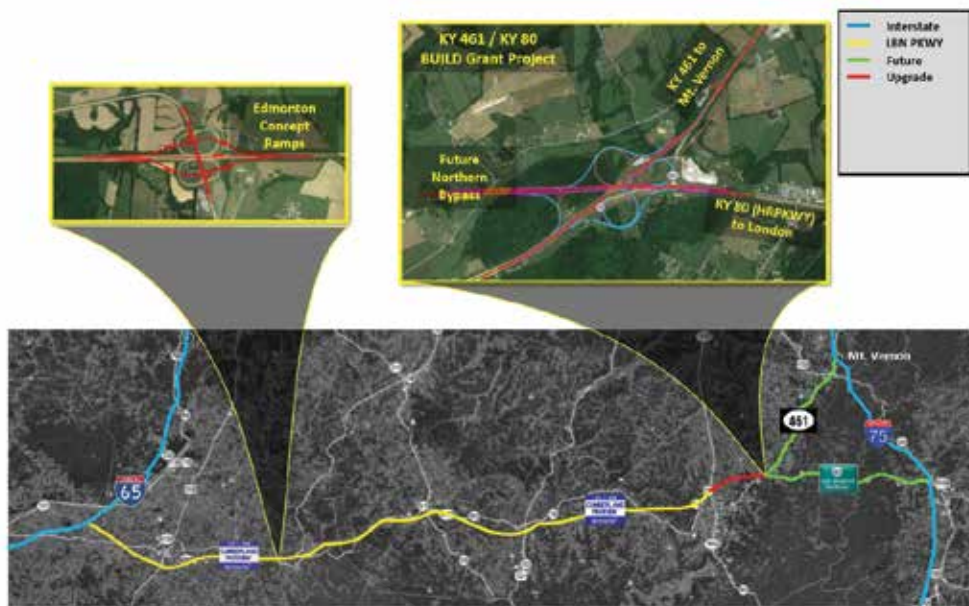
# Resources

Water is abundant in The Capital of Lake Cumberland, with low electricity and natural gas rates a bonus for businesses. In our first two years, we've also made significant progress on *road improvements, technology and commercial air service.*



### H I G H W A Y S

# SPEDA, Kentucky's Touchstone Energy Cooperatives lead Interstate 65 spur project



"This is the first step to allow *The Capital of Lake Cumberland* to *move forward* and enjoy the *economic benefits* that comes from joining the two major interstates of *I-65 and I-75*. A very special thanks to *Pulaski County's state legislators* for working with *Congressman Hal Rogers* and *SPEDA* to ensure \$500,000 was in the road plan to *move toward this goal*."

**CHRIS GIRDLER**, PRESIDENT & CEO, SPEDA

Groups identify top road priorities and work with legislators to *make them a part of the state transportation road plan*.

Seeing the need to increase the economic development appeal of Somerset-Pulaski County and other communities along the Cumberland Parkway corridor, SPEDA and Kentucky's Touchstone Energy Cooperatives worked with legislators to ensure two crucial road projects received funding to move forward.

Often, industrial site selectors dismiss these communities because the parkway creates an impression of limited accessibility.

Making the Cumberland Parkway an official spur of Interstate 65, widening Ky. 80 and 461 and installing a cloverleaf exchange at the

intersection of these highways are crucial in increasing Somerset-Pulaski County's economic development viability. Once the Cumberland Parkway is recognized as an interstate spur between I-65 and Somerset, the opportunity exists to extend the highway 32 miles to London to connect with I-75.

The initial \$500,000 will be used to determine what upgrades are necessary for the Cumberland Parkway to qualify for entry into the federal highway system. Results will be used to develop projects that would be incorporated into the state highway plan. The upgrades would then be funded with federal dollars.



Future cloverleaf intersection of Ky. 461 and Ky. 80



Left, the old data center. Middle, SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler and The Center for Rural Development's Richard Taylor and Scott Surber at the fiber hut groundbreaking. Right, the completed facility.

## Technology

### STATE-OF-THE-ART FIBER OPTIC DATA CENTER

The Center for Rural Development in Somerset has been an outstanding partner in collaborating with SPEDA and guiding our efforts to build a **new fiber optic data center** at Valley Oak Commerce Complex as part of the Ky. 80-461 transportation project.

SPEDA partnered with several private entities to house the fiber optic network inside this structure, which

**serves the entire Valley Oak Commerce Complex.**

The new facility is **the most advanced of its kind** in Kentucky — a state-of-the-art data communications hub with the **most modern technology available**. SPEDA utilized The Center's information technology team to complete the project. The Center was the lead oversight agency, managing construction from the ground-up.

## Advocacy and support

### KY. 80-461 ROAD PROJECT

As part of its commitment to identify and support the top road projects in Somerset-Pulaski County, SPEDA offered to help mitigate costs associated with the **Ky. 80-461 road expansion project** in eastern Pulaski County that was slated to begin in 2020.

▶ The project — which includes installing a **cloverleaf interchange** at the intersection of Ky. 80 and 461, **expanding Ky. 461 to four lanes** from the intersection to Buck Creek, and building **new entryways at Valley Oak Commerce Complex** — is funded in part by a \$25 million federal BUILD grant.

▶ Total cost is estimated at \$69.3 million, with a \$26.2 million state-federal apportionment, \$12.8 million in state funds, a **\$5 million local match** and other right-of-way donations.

▶ Pulaski County Fiscal Court borrowed the \$5 million local match, intending to **share responsibility for the bond payments** with the City of Somerset, SPEDA, and industries in the affected area.

▶ Given the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, SPEDA officials felt it was important for the economic development authority to **shoulder the cost** of the project for the first year — a **\$360,000 commitment**.

*Work is now underway at the Ky. 80 and 461 intersection to launch this much-needed expansion.*





## A I R T R A V E L

# Working together to bring commercial air service to Lake Cumberland Regional Airport

*Lake Cumberland Regional Airport in Somerset, pictured above and at right, is perfectly situated and ready on day one to welcome commercial air service, while the London-Corbin Airport is positioned and prepared to be a regional hub, utilizing its airport and adjacent industrial property as a location for air freight and cargo.*



The mayors of Somerset, London and Corbin, in partnership with their airport boards and economic development groups, *formed a regional alliance to bring commercial air service to Somerset and air cargo service to the London-Corbin area.*

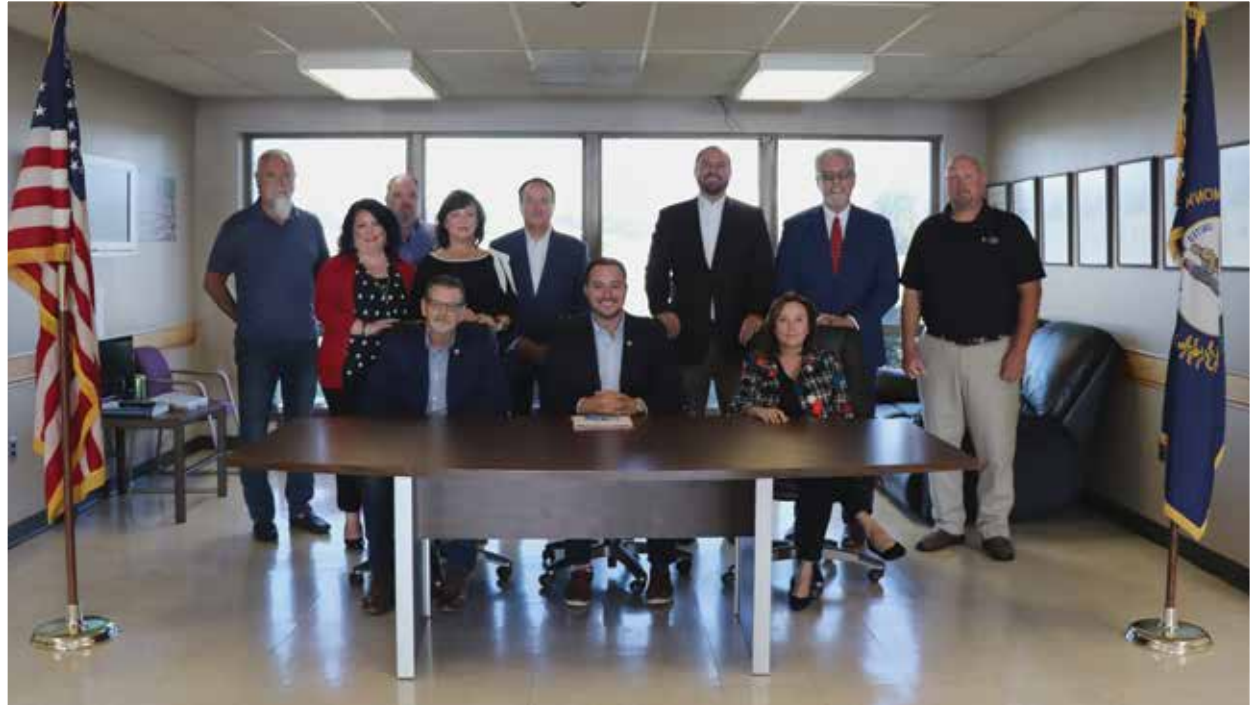


By signing a Memorandum of Understanding in October 2020, leaders in these communities agreed to ask federal legislators to transfer London-Corbin Airport's dormant federal Essential Air Service (EAS) designation to Lake Cumberland Regional Airport and allow it to be reactivated. Doing so would help the region compete nationally on tourism, economic development and quality-of-life initiatives.

The EAS program was established after airline deregulation in 1978 to guarantee small communities served by certified air carriers at that time maintain a minimal level of scheduled air service. The U.S. Department of Transportation is mandated to provide EAS communities with access to the National Air Transportation System, accomplished by subsidizing two round trips a day with 30- to 50-seat aircraft to a large- or medium-hub airport. While London-Corbin Airport has this designation, it has not been used for some time.

With the EAS designation transfer, Somerset officials would begin actively recruiting commercial air service to Lake Cumberland Regional Airport, while London and Corbin officials focus on their long-established mission of general aviation service (or civilian flying) and recruiting air cargo service.

Somerset's record-setting tourism numbers, community growth and airport infrastructure have provided productive conversations with major airline carriers thus far.



*Somerset, London and Corbin leaders signed a Memorandum of Understanding in October 2020 indicating their support for bringing commercial air service to Somerset and recruiting air cargo service to London. Seated, from left, London Mayor Troy Rudder, Somerset Mayor Alan Keck and Corbin Mayor Suzie Razmus. Back row, from left, Phil Williams, London-Corbin Airport; Kellie Baker and David Morris, Lake Cumberland Regional Airport; Paula Thompson, London-Laurel County Economic Development Authority; Richard Vanhook, Lake Cumberland Regional Airport; Chris Girdler, Somerset-Pulaski Economic Development Authority; Bruce Carpenter, Corbin Economic Development Agency; Matt Singer, London-Corbin Airport.*

"I am so appreciative to the *leaders of London and Corbin* for seeing the benefit in transferring the option for *commercial air service* to Somerset and building a region that has a *significant economic impact* in passenger travel and air cargo. Together we will *make our region shine* as a place where businesses and industries come to *grow and thrive*."



**ALAN KECK**  
SOMERSET MAYOR

### I N F R A S T R U C T U R E

# TIF districts available to spur development



*SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler presents plans for two tax increment financing districts – the Downtown Prosperity TIF and the Education & Convention Center TIF – to Somerset City Council.*



New initiative uses *growth* to pay for *growth*.

Seeing the need to provide tools that will help fund infrastructure costs associated with development, SPEDA introduced a new initiative to local government agencies that will use growth to pay for growth.

The Somerset City Council voted in December to establish two tax increment financing (TIF) districts within the Somerset city limits – one downtown and one along the U.S. 27 corridor. TIF is primarily used to help local governments spur development in declining or under-performing areas. Creating a TIF district does not raise taxes in the designated area; rather, it earmarks future property tax gains from an improved property to pay for the current cost of infrastructure improvements.

Examples of public costs that can be funded through TIF districts include sewers, water supply, storm drainage, street construction, flood control and utilities, among others.

TIF projects are not new to Kentucky – the first pilot projects were introduced here nearly 20 years ago. There are currently more than 35 TIF projects in Kentucky representing more than \$10 billion in investment. TIF districts have funded public costs for successful projects in growing cities like Williamstown, Bowling Green, Paducah and Owensboro.

The city committed to contributing 75 percent of property tax revenue generated during a 20-year term to the TIFs. The city will determine how the captured revenues are used to foster development in the designated areas. Pulaski County Fiscal Court and the Pulaski County Library board are also weighing participation.





The Somerset-Lake Cumberland REALTORS® present SPEDA with a \$3,333 CODE grant to help build a handicap-accessible pier at Pulaski County Park. From left, DECO Architects' Derek Phillips, SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler, Kevin Pinson, Somerset-Lake Cumberland REALTORS® President Donna Foster, Kentucky REALTORS® President Lester Sanders, Somerset-Lake Cumberland REALTORS® representative Mindy Sweet, and Somerset-Lake Cumberland REALTORS® President-Elect Barry Turner.

### L A K E C U M B E R L A N D

## Reeling in financial support for handicap-accessible fishing pier

SPEDA received a \$3,333 grant from Somerset-Lake Cumberland REALTORS® to help build the pier at Pulaski County Park on Lake Cumberland, *filling a need for the community and fulfilling a dream for a local young man with autism, cerebral palsy and a love for fishing.*

The grant, awarded by the Somerset-Lake Cumberland REALTORS®, is part of a new Kentucky REALTORS® (KYR) initiative that encourages realtor associations to play a leadership role in making their communities better places to live and work.

Soon after moving to Somerset, Kevin Pinson and his family struggled to find a good fishing spot that was accessible to his son Ryan's special needs. So he put his energy into trying to fulfill this need in his community — a safe, practical resource for the mobility impaired members of the community to access the lake — and made it part of his flagship project as a member of Leadership Lake Cumberland.

Upon hearing about Pinson's idea, SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler wanted to find a way to make it a reality — not only for the Pinsons, but for the many residents and visitors to Lake Cumberland who could benefit from such access.

Girdler said SPEDA chose to build the pier — named Pinson Pier in honor of the Pinson family — at Pulaski County Park because the park offers public access to the lake and more than 800 acres of walking and biking trails, shelter and cabin rentals, and campsites. He collaborated with the U.S. Corps of Engineers on the project.





Somerset-Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce building



# Cultural enrichment

Quality of life is essential to successful economic development. We strive to ensure current and future residents have the best resources and experiences available to keep them *healthy, happy and content to make Pulaski County their home.*





## ARTS

# Mural an effort to continue building a thriving downtown

The outdoor art project on one of downtown's historic buildings was a partnership between SPEDA and four local groups to honor the area's *rich history in the arts, its cultural connection to the railroad industry and its strong agricultural heritage*.

Designed and painted by local artist Jordan Justice, the new mural shines on the side of the old Food Fair building on East Mount Vernon Street facing the Lake Cumberland Farmers Market.

Sunbeams burst from the horizon over a Burnett Farms field, with a Norfolk Southern train running through the land and a houseboat cruising Lake Cumberland in the background. A bouquet of summer flowers lines one side of the mural, introducing visitors to the entrance of Be You Boutique, which is located inside

the building. SPEDA partnered with Phoenix Wellness to apply for a grant from Norfolk Southern Railroad to help fund the mural. Burnett Farms and Be You Boutique also contributed to the effort, which took two weeks to complete.

Originally from eastern Kentucky, Justice has called Somerset home for 12 years. His artwork is familiar to downtown — his first mural here can be seen on the side of the Somerset-Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce building and is visible from the one he completed for SPEDA.

## Accomplishments

CITY RECEIVES  
STATE'S HIGHEST  
ARTS AWARD



The **City of Somerset** received the state's most prestigious arts award, the Governor's Award in the Arts, for its support of the arts through government action. The city and **Mayor Alan Keck**, pictured with the award above, were nominated for the annual award for Keck's vision and work to revitalize downtown, increase tourism and enhance the culture of the city with the arts as the focus.

T O U R I S M

# Pulaski sees record visitor spending

Kentucky Department of Tourism figures showed that in 2019, Pulaski County had its *largest-ever annual increase* in visitor spending, *up 6.4 percent from the previous year*.

This is proof that efforts to give visitors more experiences in Somerset-Pulaski County are working, Lake Cumberland Tourism Executive Director Michelle Allen said.

“When you look at the differences between 2018 and 2019, the common denominator is clearly a change in leadership and a commitment to community partnerships that are bringing new opportunities to people visiting Somerset,” Allen said. “Our new downtown festivals combined with a focus on arts and culture and our already outstanding visitor experiences like Somernites Cruise, Haney’s Appledale Farm, Master Musicians Festival and the Mill Springs



Battlefield Visitors Center and Museum give visitors more ways to see our community.”

Allen pointed to the creation of SPEDA in 2019 and the effort to widen the lens of economic development to encompass quality-of-life initiatives as another example of positive change. Tourism is now being treated as an industry in Pulaski County, she said. Tourism supports thousands of jobs in Pulaski County and saves every household \$344 per year in taxes, which in turn boosts the local economy.



Allen

## Partnerships

### ARE YOU READY?



To keep the momentum going after the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the **Somerset Tourist & Convention Commission, Lake Cumberland Tourism** and **SPEDA** partnered in a statewide advertising campaign to let people know Somerset-Pulaski County and Lake Cumberland were ready and open for business. As a result, tourism kept pace and at times exceeded the previous year.



# Welcome to The Capital of Lake Cumberland



Somerset and Pulaski County have a new official designation, one that positions the community *as the regional hub of the Lake Cumberland area*.

SPEDA partnered with Lake Cumberland Tourism to certify the city and county as The Capital of Lake Cumberland through the Kentucky Secretary of State's office.

The registered service mark will help communicate that Somerset-Pulaski County is

the regional leader for tourism and economic development and help unify marketing and recruitment efforts for both organizations.

Tourism is Pulaski County's largest industry. Lake Cumberland draws 4 million recreational visitors per year — more than Yellowstone National Park,

and at one point the Grand Canyon — and is the No. 1 destination in Pulaski County. According to the 2019 Kentucky Department of Tourism economic impact report, visitors spent more than \$126 million in Pulaski County, generating significant tax revenue and supporting thousands of jobs.

As the largest city near the water, Somerset also has the distinction of being the Houseboat Capital of the World and is filled with attractions on and off the lake.



“The popularity of our lake is a vital part of the prosperity of our families. To be named The Capital of Lake Cumberland gives us credibility *for future visitors to experience right here in Somerset and Pulaski County*.”

**STEVE KELLEY**, PULASKI COUNTY JUDGE-EXECUTIVE

B O U R B O N

# Celebrating Horse Soldier Bourbon's story

SPEDA introduced the community to the founders of its first bourbon distillery through a *Whiskey & War Stories luncheon* Oct. 28, 2020. To a packed crowd, the founders shared their story of being the *first U.S. Army Special Forces unit to enter Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks*.

Presented by SPEDA in partnership with Lake Cumberland Tourism, the Somerset Tourist & Convention Commission, the Somerset-Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce and Burnside Tourism, Whiskey & War Stories has become a trademark event in communities where Horse Soldier Bourbon is expanding operations.

During the luncheon, Horse Soldier founders John Koko, Mark Nutsch, Bob Pennington and Scott Neil shared stories of their military experience and their adventures in building a bourbon brand to a sold-out crowd of nearly 300 people.

The distillery is a multi-million dollar project that will make Somerset the southernmost point on the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. Building here is a homecoming for these veterans, many of whom were stationed in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, during their service to the United States.

Proceeds from the luncheon and a private event the following day were dedicated to opening a veterans' park in downtown Somerset. More than \$30,000 was raised in two days for the project.



Horse Soldier founders John Koko, left, and Mark Nutsch present at the luncheon.





CHARITABLE GIVING

# Making business about people in new ways

With a desire to create more opportunities for public-private partnerships, SPEDA established a charitable foundation that will raise money for community initiatives. *This endeavor is the first of its kind for an economic development group in Kentucky.*

The SPEDA Community Foundation is a certified 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that accepts donations from residents and businesses to advance local projects. When applying for grant funding to complete a new mural downtown last year, SPEDA officials discovered the need for having a non-profit that can partner in applying for and raising funds to complete a project.

The foundation will build public-private partnerships in the community to advance these projects, because it offers a tax-deductible way for businesses

and residents to contribute.

The first project to benefit will be a veterans' park in downtown Somerset. SPEDA raised the first \$30,000 for the project through a Whiskey & War Stories public luncheon and private event last fall. The community has since donated in various ways to raise more than \$75,000 for the park, and fundraising is ongoing.

SPEDA's board of directors will choose future projects the community foundation supports, and SPEDA will strive to match contributions the foundation makes to those projects at a level to be determined.



**MORE THAN**  
**\$75K**

**RAISED IN LESS THAN 6 MONTHS  
FOR A VETERANS' PARK  
IN DOWNTOWN SOMERSET**



**Make an online donation:**  
**[somersetkyleads.com/speda-community-foundation/](https://somersetkyleads.com/speda-community-foundation/)**

### P A R K S

# Community embraces veterans' park project

Plans for the park are well underway, and support garnered *through a local 22-Push-Up Challenge*.

Detailed architectural renderings for the park — which will be located on the corner of Oak and Main streets downtown — show its star attraction, a military tank set atop a platform adorned with the words “United We Stand” that will honor all branches of military service. SPEDA is working directly with the offices of federal legislators to apply for and obtain the tank through the military surplus division.

Another highlight is a reflection area that features a Gold Star Families Memorial Monument. These monuments, established in partnership with the Woody Williams Foundation, can be found across the United States. Gold Star Family members and relatives are those who have lost a loved one during his or her service to the U.S. armed forces.

The park will also feature structures that pay tribute to local veterans: four-star Gen. Jack Gregory, Triple Ace fighter pilot Vermont Garrison, and Rosie the Riveter. There will also be an area where community members who want to pay tribute to military family members or friends can have their names engraved into a walkway.



### Promotion

## 22-PUSH-UP CHALLENGE RAISES MONEY, AWARENESS

To raise additional funds for the veterans' park, SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler issued a **local 22-Push-Up Challenge** — **22 push-ups for 22 days** to bring awareness to the statistic that **22 veterans per day commit suicide**. But he also challenged those who participate to **contribute \$22** to the SPEDA Community Foundation to support the park.

Several in the community have participated so far, including **Somerset Mayor Alan Keck** to **local magistrates, school officials**, University of Kentucky basketball standout **Reggie Hanson** and even classes of **elementary and middle school students**. Participants posted a video of their push-ups on social media and challenged three others to join in.

The effort attracted statewide media coverage when **Somerset Police Chief William Hunt** challenged **Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson** to participate and donate.



Hopkins Elem.  
students



ABC36 coverage



Magistrate  
Jason Turpen





# Cooperative spirit

We're moving forward in Somerset and Pulaski County, together. *We can accomplish so much more through unity and collaboration.*



INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

# Collaborating to build SPEDA Commerce Park

Development of build-ready sites at the 142-acre park is underway, *with the first tenant secured and dirt being turned.*

SPEDA Commerce Park is a tangible evidence of the true city-county partnership that exists in Somerset and Pulaski County. The City of Somerset and Pulaski County Fiscal Court joined SPEDA to make the development a reality in 2020 — offering potential industrial prospects a new option that provides attractive four-lane road access soon enhanced by the construction of two interchanges at the Ky. 80 and Ky. 461 intersection.

Officials broke ground for the park in the fall of 2020.

Formerly known as the Garner property in the Pine Hill and Barnesburg Road area, SPEDA Commerce Park is a 142-acre development that will offer certified build-ready sites to industrial prospects. The park's first tenant, the Kentucky National Guard, announced in summer 2020 its intentions to build a new regional readiness center and field maintenance shop there on 18 acres.

AGE Engineering Services Inc. will develop the park, with Weddle Enterprises partnering on the design-build portion of the project. SPEDA is aggressively applying for grant funds to develop the park — moving swiftly to prepare build-ready sites while also conducting site tours with prospective clients and site selectors that seem to be promising and productive.



“Being able to see our county and city governments work so well together is a beautiful thing *and will continue to pay tremendous dividends for us as we move this community forward together.*”

**CHRIS GIRDLER**, SPEDA PRESIDENT & CEO





PARTNERSHIPS

# SPEDA donates Lineman Training Center to Somerset Community College

Donating the property to the college demonstrates SPEDA's commitment to education and workforce development efforts, *and puts an emphasis on community collaboration.*

The 8-acre tract of land and building is home to SCC's Lineman Training Program, a \$2.5 million partnership between the college, SPEDA, South Kentucky RECC, Lake Cumberland Area Development District, and American Electric Power.

Many other utility industry partners have also donated equipment and materials to support the Lineman Training Center since its inception more than a decade ago.

Today, SCC's Lineman Training Center offers its training course every nine weeks year-round. The curriculum uses proven training methods taught by instructors with extensive experience in the utility industry. Upon completion of the course, students have spent about 240 hours in the field and have all the necessary training to enter the line utility industry.

The idea was born from the need for regional utility companies and cooperatives to provide training for entry-level linemen and, at the time, a decline in the number of linemen nationwide.

In the beginning, SPEDA's predecessor, the development foundation, offered to provide property for the project as well as apply for a grant to help fund building the training center on the grounds. As the development foundation was dissolved and SPEDA was created to take its place, SPEDA retained ownership of the property.

SPEDA will continue to keep education and workforce development as a top priority, seeking ways to collaborate and partner with public and private sectors to enhance economic development and promote community unity.



From left, Somerset Community College Vice President of Workforce Solutions Alesa Johnson, Lake Cumberland Area Development District Executive Director Darryl McGaha, SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler, SCC President and CEO Carey Castle, South Kentucky RECC VP of Engineering and Operations Kevin Newton and Lineman Training Coordinator Dean Rhodes.

## Lineman Training Center Partners

SPEDA

Somerset Community College

South Kentucky RECC

Lake Cumberland Area  
Development District  
American Electric Power

B E A U T I F I C A T I O N

# SPEDA unites with Eastern KY Pride for bi-annual community clean-up

Event evolves into a fall and spring effort and adds new component — *a challenge for local students to pick up trash to win prizes.*

The collaborative endeavor between Eastern KY PRIDE, SPEDA and six other local organizations launched in October 2020 and will be hosted in April and October annually. The 2021 spring event coincides with Earth Day — April 19-23.

Local businesses, residents and students rally to pick up litter along U.S. 27, downtown Somerset streets, the Ky. 914 bypass and roadways near industrial parks, joining what is Eastern KY PRIDE's largest event across 42 counties. More than 1,000 people participate annually.

While inviting local businesses to participate has been successful over the years and remains a vital part of the

Clean Sweep, organizers wanted to find a way for young people to get involved in being good stewards of the environment.

What resulted is the Triple Bag Challenge, a week-long contest for all elementary through high school students living in Somerset and Pulaski County. Students are invited to pick up three bags of trash during Clean Sweep week from roadways in the community for a chance to win one of several prizes — including two \$500 cash prizes, gift cards, gas cards, and two passes to SomerSplash Waterpark.

More than 15 local students received prizes for participation during the fall event.

Adding this component to the Clean Sweep makes an already flourishing community event have an even larger impact — one that is extremely important in a community where tourism is its largest industry.



From top, Triple Bag Challenge participants Charleston and Channing Girdler; Kyrsten, Benny and Ezekiel Baker; and Macy Hudson.





## Cooperative Spirit



God's Food Pantry representatives receive the key to the Palm Beach factory building from SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler. From left, GFP board members Melissa Lancaster and Ron Shepherd, Girdler, GFP Executive Director Brenda Russell, board member Mike Hornback and board president Jeremy Cole.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

# Giving the gift of growth

SPEDA sells 95,000-square-foot building to God's Food Pantry at a significantly reduced price, *helping the non-profit address food insecurity in new ways and achieve its dream to expand.*



In Kentucky,  
**1 in 7 is food insecure**  
8th highest rate in the U.S.

# 500%

Increase in number of people served  
at God's Food Pantry in last seven years

God's Food Pantry has fed Pulaski Countians in need for nearly four decades from its South Central Avenue location. The organization outgrew its space some time ago. The purchase of the facility once occupied by Palm Beach Company will allow God's Food Pantry to serve the community in new ways.

Somerset-Pulaski County's former economic development foundation took ownership of the Bourne Avenue building when Palm Beach Company ceased operations in Somerset several years ago. The property was transferred to SPEDA when the old foundation dissolved. Soon after, SPEDA began donating storage space in the facility to God's Food Pantry, beginning a relationship that led to the recent purchase.

SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler said the transaction reflects SPEDA's continued effort to improve the quality of life for every Pulaski Countian through a holistic approach to economic development.

"At SPEDA, we believe in marching together toward a common goal of making Somerset-Pulaski County the best it can be for our citizens and business community," Girdler said. "We are a part of and a driving force behind something bigger than ourselves. We care about our community and our neighbors, and being able to help God's Food Pantry expand affordably will have an exponential impact on people in Somerset and Pulaski County. Through this, we are living up to our motto of **making business about people**, and that means people from all walks of life."

## Cooperative Spirit

### M O V I N G   F O R W A R D ,   T O G E T H E R

The photo wall in SPEDA's board room has become a symbol of collaboration. Many outstanding community, regional and state leaders have gathered here to discuss how we can make Somerset, Pulaski County and Kentucky a better place.

*Here are just a few people and organizations we've been proud to host during the last two years, and a few places to which we've been honored to be invited.*



Above, the Leadership Kentucky Class of 2019 on Lake Cumberland; top right, a community open house to celebrate SPEDA's Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting; middle, members of the Kentucky Arts Council; far right, Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Ryan Quarles at Gatormade Trailers.





Top row, left, a visit with U.S. Rep. Hal Rogers; right, hosting Masamichi (Mike) Takahashi, executive director of the Asia Representative Office of the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development. Middle row, left, representatives of SOAR, the City of Somerset and the City of Corbin; second from left, coaches from the Kentucky Small Business Development Center; second from right, hosting Colby Hall, new executive director of SOAR; right, hosting Brett Traver, executive director of SKED. Bottom row, far left, a tour of the Somerset-Pulaski Special Response Team headquarters with Chief Doug Baker; left, hosting Eastern Kentucky University President David McFadden.





# Innovation

Thinking outside the box and challenging the status quo is our strong suit. SPEDA continuously strives to develop and support new programs that *foster business growth, improve workforce development, increase tourism and encourage industry leaders.*



B U S I N E S S S U P P O R T

# Finding ways to innovate during a global pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the economy, SPEDA chose to pivot, *moving boldly and expediently in a number of ways to help existing businesses.*

One of them: Putting SPEDA's inaugural mini-grant program on the fast-track. This program provides a funding opportunity for local businesses with plans to innovate and expand their operations. Four applicants were chosen to receive \$2,500 each to advance their operations — and they received their awards two months early.

SPEDA also went to work quickly to help businesses secure the personal protective equipment (PPE) they needed as the economy slowly began to reopen. SPEDA purchased and donated 1,000 masks to state-registered childcare centers in the community, in addition to informing business owners about other sources

in Somerset and Pulaski County where they can be purchased.

"We saw purchasing and donating PPE as a way to help protect our children, our childcare workers, and give parents peace of mind as we slowly and safely re-open the economy," SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler said. "Our tagline is **'making business about people.'** Being able to bring our existing businesses help when they need it most is how we make that a reality."

SPEDA kept the business community informed throughout the pandemic about the local, state and federal resources available to help them through the crisis.



## Meeting a need

### SCC MAKES 3D-PRINTED SHIELDS

Another story of innovation: Somerset Community College's additive engineering program put its 3D printers to work to create face shields for Lake Cumberland Regional Hospital amid a supply shortage.



In addition to face masks, SPEDA partnered with State Sen. Rick Girdler and Arlington Scott Inc. to donate hand sanitizer to childcare centers.



Somerset Mayor Alan Keck, SPEDA President + CEO Chris Girdler and Pulaski County Judge-Executive Steve Kelley with the recipients of SPEDA's inaugural mini-grants. From left, Paul Underwood of 19 Kilo Turkey Calls, Danielle and Josh Anderson of Get Ur Smoke On BBQ, Steven Dykes and Josh Jones of Buck Creek Outfitters and John Fitzwater of The Market on Main.

## G R O W T H

# Inaugural mini-grants come at the right time

SPEDA awarded its first round of mini-grants in 2020, giving \$2,500 to four local businesses with plans to innovate and expand their operations. *The awards were a welcome announcement for these business owners as they dealt with the economic shutdown caused by COVID-19.*

"We want to pay forward our spirit of innovation so that businesses can in turn *innovate and make our economy stronger.*"

**CHRIS GIRDLER,**  
SPEDA PRESIDENT + CEO

SPEDA awarded its first round of mini-grants in 2020, giving \$2,500 to four local businesses with plans to innovate and expand their operations.

The Market on Main, 19 Kilo Turkey Calls, Get Ur Smoke On BBQ and Buck Creek Outfitters were the first benefactors of the program, which was put on the fast track in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn.

Businesses can apply for a variety of projects, including but not limited to strategic planning and management; purchase or physical improvements to facilities or equipment; training; or leadership, planning and management

capacity initiatives. Applicants were required to demonstrate their benefit to the community — presenting an overall plan, specific need for investment and ways in which funds will be utilized.

A new series of mini-grants will be awarded every year. The program was made possible through **good management and proper financial oversight at SPEDA that has helped the organization save thousands annually.**

In 2021, Forcht Broadcasting joined the program as a sponsor, committing to giving each mini-grant recipient an additional \$2,500 in advertising.





### SPOTLIGHT

## Telling our story

SPEDA video series highlights the *community's major economic sectors*.

Telling and sharing Somerset and Pulaski County's story — especially as it relates to the pillars that help its economy thrive — has been a top priority at SPEDA.

In the organization's first two years, SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler interviewed education, healthcare and tourism professionals in the community in an effort to share all of the ways these sectors enhance the local economy.

■ [somersetkyleads.com/newsroom/video-library/](https://somersetkyleads.com/newsroom/video-library/)



## Training

### FOLLOWING THE RULES

SPEDA is not only interested in finding ways to innovate that help businesses. Being able to provide essential skills and education to the entire community, as well as demonstrate the organization's commitment to transparency, are two important goals.

To that end, SPEDA launched a **free, community-wide training program** for anyone interested in learning parliamentary procedure.

Delivered by Zella Pearson, president of Priority 1 Inc. in Somerset, the training lead participants through the guidelines of **Robert's Rules of Order**, the most widely used manual of parliamentary procedure in the United States. First published in 1876, Robert's Rules of Order governs the meetings of a diverse range of organizations — including church groups, sports organizations, homeowners' associations, non-profits, professional societies, school boards and site-based decision making councils.

"We believe **transparency** is extremely important in **fostering goodwill** in the community and creating a **trusting environment** where we all work, live and play," SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler said. "Knowing how to **govern properly** is essential to that."



## NETWORKING

# SPEDA brings industrial leaders together

In an effort to connect with the community's industry leaders and be responsive to their needs, *SPEDA launched a quarterly Industrial Leaders Breakfast series.*

Hosted at Somerset Community College, the events hosted so far have attracted a full house — participants representing as many as 25 local companies and entities ranging from Pulaski County's largest manufacturers to the community's educational institutions and public utilities.

So far, the series has been a way to introduce the group to SPEDA and its endeavors, while also addressing training programs, education and workforce development issues. SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler

stressed the importance of continuing these gatherings, which will highlight needs in the business community and add accountability for fulfilling them.

"SPEDA is committed to growing a strong workforce, maintaining a seamless transition for new industry partners and keeping the lines of communication open for existing businesses," Girdler said. "This series will encourage us to hold each other accountable and ensure that we are hearing these leaders' concerns and doing our best to address them."

*Top, SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler addresses industrial leaders at Somerset Community College.*



R E S P O N D I N G

## Valley Oak upgrades address concerns for local industries

SPEDA invests in signage, overflow truck lot, technology and food truck plaza *to help Valley Oak Commerce Complex thrive.*

SPEDA is extremely proud of Valley Oak Commerce Complex and the businesses thriving there. In order to support this important industrial park in Pulaski County, SPEDA invested in solutions to tractor-trailer traffic congestion by building an overflow truck lot and adding signage.

The overflow lot ensures a safe and clean process for shipments, deliveries and commerce. The interior signage facelift aided in providing directions and cosmetic

improvements as the community prepared for the Ky. 80-461 road project — a \$70 million endeavor that will widen sections of Ky. 461 and install a cloverleaf exchange at the intersection of the two highways.

SPEDA also opened a food truck plaza at Valley Oak in the spring of 2020, providing a safe environment for vendors, customers and others to enjoy breaks and lunch periods with local food in a peaceful setting.





# Education + workforce

The education we provide, the skills we teach and the way we treat those who choose to open their doors here are crucial in *retaining and recruiting employees and businesses.*



H I G H E R E D U C A T I O N

# SPEDA supports private four-year university

University of Somerset will be built in the liberal arts tradition with a focus on technology and scientific development, *complementing the excellent public education institutions in Somerset.*



Architectural rendering of the University of Somerset, planned at site of Cundiff Square downtown.

Education and workforce development play major roles in SPEDA's holistic approach to strengthening the local economy — an approach uniquely focused on initiatives that make business about people.

To that end, SPEDA supports an endeavor to build a traditional four-year university in the heart of downtown Somerset — the University of Somerset. Not only will it enhance educational opportunities and workforce development for the people of our community and abroad, but its creation also embodies each and every one of our core values with the ultimate goal of improving quality of life.

A feasibility study conducted in 2018, before SPEDA was formed, shows a four-year institution could generate as much as \$128 million for the community and more than 1,000 jobs. The University of Somerset will bring

students from across the state, nation and world to Pulaski County. It has the potential to increase tourism, serve as a significant recruitment tool for new business and industry, and retain scores of bright students who otherwise would have left the community to pursue this kind of education elsewhere.

The University of Somerset is being formed as a highly selective and academically rigorous liberal arts undergraduate university with a select offering of master's degrees and Ph.D. programs. It strives to build an education on a foundation of character, patriotism and virtue, preparing students to stand up for liberty and truth by teaching them how to think for themselves.

It's a world-class education that can equip the next generation to lead in the global marketplace, and SPEDA is proud to lend its support.

UNIVERSITY OF SOMERSET'S POTENTIAL IMPACT

**\$128** million **1,000** jobs

H I G H E R E D U C A T I O N

# Partnering to provide multiple career pathways

SPEDA believes providing quality educational opportunities at home for students *is important in ensuring their future success*. SCC is an excellent partner in this endeavor.

Educational opportunities give them the best chance at stable employment, an income to support themselves and their families, which develops their communities.

Somerset Community College, part of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, offers two-year degree programs and workforce solutions for students interested in entering health care, culinary arts, computer technology, mechanics and engineering fields, among many others. A new initiative, The University Center of Southern Kentucky, provides several pathways for students to earn a four-year degree from partnering universities in Kentucky on the campus of SCC after completing a two-year program.

The college's career technical education and short-term training options like lineman training, CDL training or the KY FAME advanced manufacturing program are outstanding options for students who want to pursue a career path in a technical field.

SPEDA and SCC work hand-in-hand on several workforce development initiatives, and we are a proud partner and supporter of the community college and its programs.





H I G H E R E D U C A T I O N

# KY FAME program helps build a Work Ready Community



SPEDA has great interest in helping educate and train skilled employees *to ensure businesses have the manpower they need to be successful.*

As a certified Kentucky Work Ready Community, we show our commitment to providing the highly-skilled workforce required in today's competitive global economy.

The KY FAME AMT program at Somerset Community College combines college coursework with paid, on-the-job training and experience, as well as personal behaviors and core manufacturing skills desired by manufacturers. Every year, SCC prepares students to go pro in high paying, in-demand careers in advanced manufacturing that lead to a better life. Because SCC aligns its programs with local business needs, students are prepared to walk out of college and into a high-paying career.

At the end of the program, students participate in the Kentucky Manufacturing Going Pro Signing Day, a celebration for new hires in advanced manufacturing and the companies they will represent. Five Pulaski County companies attended the signing day event in 2019 and SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler was the event's commencement speaker. During the past five years, 30 students have graduated from the KY FAME program.

## National recognition

### APPRENTICESHIP, RE-IMAGINED

The **KY FAME Cumberlands Chapter** was recently featured in a story in *The Wall Street Journal* about apprenticeship programs. Research shows initiatives like KY FAME are proof that four-year degrees aren't the only path to a high salary for graduates. SPEDA is a proud partner of the KY FAME program and appreciates its work to improve workforce development in the region.



## Customer Service

### SPEDA HOSTS FREE HOSPITALITY TRAINING



SPEDA hosted its **first free hospitality training series** in July 2020, focusing on the basics of excellent customer service while teaching employees how to direct visitors to community events and attractions.

Taught by **Lake Cumberland Tourism Executive Director Michelle Allen** and **Thoroughbred Hospitality Group Director of Sales JaKaye Garth**, the course covered telephone etiquette, verbal and non-verbal communication, dealing with difficult customers, e-mail and social media etiquette, dressing for success and knowing the community.

The training was **targeted to front-line employees** — those who work in hotel lobbies, retail, dining establishments, convenience stores or other positions that interact directly with visitors. The group discussed how to **tailor customer service** to each individual visitor to give them the best experience possible.

**Tourism** is Pulaski County's No. 1 industry, **generating more than \$126 million in revenue** and **drawing 4 million recreational visitors a year**. Because of this, SPEDA put a high priority in its first year on offering this training.

## Education + Workforce

### W O R K F O R C E D E V E L O P M E N T

# Employer-led consortium offers quality, affordable training

In one of SPEDA's many partnerships with Somerset Community College, *an employer-led association has been revived to provide inexpensive, in-demand training to members.*

The Lake Cumberland Regional Training Consortium (LCRTC) offers a variety of courses in leadership, team building, customer service, information technology and safety, helping employees of member businesses improve their skills and offering networking opportunities for those companies that choose to join.

Becoming a member also provides employers with 50 points toward their Bluegrass State Skills Grant application, which offers reimbursements for worker training at Kentucky's new and expanding companies and for skills and occupational upgrade training for workers of

Kentucky's existing companies.

Membership to the consortium is \$100 per year for an organization, and any employee of that organization is eligible to participate in training sessions. The typical cost per participant for each class is between \$25 to \$40, depending upon the materials required for the course. Members of the consortium will complete a training list survey annually, the results of which determine the top 12 training classes that will be presented to the membership for approval. Once approved, those 12 classes — one class per month — will be offered for the upcoming year.

"The Lake Cumberland Regional Training Consortium has proven *invaluable* to Cobb-Vantress of the past years ... The courses offered are *professional* and *economical*."

**LORRIE WEST**, COBB-VANTRESS INC. HR COMPLEX MANAGER



W O R K F O R C E   D E V E L O P M E N T

# SPEDA introduces workforce reentry initiative

The CRITICAL program — Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Inmates Transforming Individuals Community and Livelihoods — *will help incarcerated men and women gain a new start on life when they are released.*

The three-phase program — a partnership between SPEDA, Somerset Community College and the Pulaski County Detention Center — will offer soft skills and technical training to inmates while also creating a transformational center inside the jail where employees can learn about job opportunities available and interview.

Inmates who complete the program will receive 30 days off time served. And by being better prepared to reenter the workforce, they are less likely to return to jail.

The initiative began by implementing soft-skills training at the jail. The curriculum, developed by human behavior and organization dynamics expert Greg Coker, teaches inmates important interpersonal skills — communication, team-building, problem-solving, leadership and work ethic — vital to successful collaboration in the workplace. The program was then expanded to offer technical training to those inmates who need to learn a specific industry skill, like welding, industrial maintenance, concrete



From left, SCC Vice President of Workforce Solutions Alesa Johnson, Pulaski County Jailer Anthony McCollum, human behavior and organization dynamics expert Greg Coker and SPEDA President and CEO Chris Girdler sign an agreement to bring Coker's soft-skills reentry curriculum to the Pulaski County Detention Center.

finishing or information technology. Inmates who need this training meet with an adviser and begin a college course track to earn the appropriate certification. Those inmates who do not need technical training instead take professional skills courses to further prepare them for job interviews.

After these two phases are complete an adviser sends the inmate's resumé to potential employers. The inmate will interview until hired and will begin working until his or her

release. If jobs are not immediately available, CRITICAL will provide training for the inmate on support services so he or she is successful in getting a job after release.

In addition to the soft-skills curriculum used at the jail, Coker provides coaching and training programs that focus on purpose and engagement as a catalyst for personal transformation. He said Somerset has the opportunity to be a model for Kentucky and the nation by implementing this program.

W O R K F O R C E D E V E L O P M E N T

# Helping local industries hire employees

SPEDA partnered with TTAI, Hendrickson and Hollaender to host hiring events, *assisting these companies in finding qualified candidates for attractive positions.*

Because of our emphasis on customer service, Somerset-Pulaski County is the easiest place in Kentucky to do business. SPEDA is intimately focused on increasing interaction with existing businesses in Somerset-Pulaski County. Here they'll find a helpful and engaged team that wants to help with growth and expansion efforts, as well as building the workforce.

That's why SPEDA was at the ready to help local industries TTAI, Hendrickson and Hollaender Manufacturing with hiring events to find qualified candidates for attractive positions. During 2020 we helped these companies fill more than 100 positions at competitive wages. The Kentucky Career Center and The Job Shop were fantastic partners in helping these companies navigate the hiring process.



Above, from left, Kentucky Career Center's Shirlene Taylor, Hollaender President & COO Marc Cetrulo, and SPEDA President & CEO Chris Cirdler. Left, SPEDA helped Hendrickson and TTAI promote their hiring events through social media.





*2019-2020 Founding Board of Directors*



*2021-2022 Board of Directors*





**Making business about *people*.**