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Tom Ferguson Takes Reins Of Greene Co. Partnership

Veteran Industry Recruiter Returns; Says First Priority Will Be Contacting Local Companies

BY DOUGLAS WATSON
MANAGING EDITOR

Tom Ferguson this morning began his second stint as president of the Greene County Partnership.

In 1993 Ferguson was instrumental in forming the Greene County Partnership. He served as its president until early 2001.

In an interview with *The Greeneville Sun* at his office today, Ferguson said that this week he will be calling many local companies to ask what, if anything, he can do to help them during this difficult economic period.

Earlier this month, the GCP's board of directors voted unanimously to hire Ferguson. The board acted after months of interviewing applicants for its top staff position.

In announcing his appointment, Partnership Board Chairman Randy Rumbley said, "Tom's



SUN PHOTO BY PHIL GENTRY

Tom Ferguson, shown above, this morning started to work as the Greene County Partnership's new president. It is a position he previously held for eight years in the 1990s.

economic development skills and his knowledge of Greene County will be the perfect combination to lead the Partnership into the future.

"His professional leadership abilities and determination are exactly what is needed in these tough times to help Greene County improve

its economic status."

Rumbley said the GCP's Executive Committee had reviewed applications "from over 20 individuals" seeking the position, which includes the role of being the community's chief industrial recruiter.

HEADED REGIONAL ALLIANCE
Ferguson has recently

completed almost two years as interim president of the Regional Alliance for Economic Development.

The Alliance is an organization responsible for marketing a 10-county region that includes Greene County.

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Newt Raff, chairman of the Regional Alliance, said, "We greatly appreciate Tom's efforts over the past 22 months as the Alliance has made tremendous progress during his tenure."

"In this regard, Tom will continue to help the Alliance on a limited basis through December."

Ferguson has extensive experience as a recruiter of industries and other businesses.

'NEED NEW COMPANIES, JOBS'

In the interview this morning, he said that while with the Regional Alliance, he frequently traveled to Atlanta, New York or Dallas to meet with companies considering opening a facility in Northeast Tennessee.

However, he said, it is going to take awhile for this region to recover from the setbacks dealt the region by the national recession.

Ferguson said Northeast Tennessee did not feel the full impact of what many are calling the "Great Recession" as much as some other areas of the country, but he added that this region also is not going to experience a recovery as soon as some other areas.

He noted that, although economists

have declared that the national recession technically ended in June 2009, in this region recessionary conditions persist.

Here in Greene County, he estimated, in the last couple of years, "800 to 1,000 jobs have been lost" as the result of local plants closing.

"We need new companies to locate facilities here and hire workers," he said.

FIRST GCP PRESIDENT

A native Oklahoman, Ferguson served as GCP president from June 1993 to March 2001 during what became nearly a decade of dramatic local economic growth spearheaded by the Partnership.

In June 1992, he had come to Greeneville to become the executive director of what was then the Greene County Economic Development Board.

The following year, four local agencies — the Economic Development Board, what was then the Greeneville-Greene County Area Chamber of Commerce, what was then the Greene County Tourism Council, and what was then Keep Greene Clean (now Keep Greene Beautiful) — merged to form the Greene County Partnership.

During the years of Ferguson's presidency, local employment grew by several thousand jobs through a combination of new industrial plants and expansion of

existing industries, and the Partnership played a key leadership role in a variety of other forward steps in local economic and community development.

He and his wife, Terri, have resided in Greene County since 1992.

EARLIER BACKGROUND

Before coming to Greeneville, Ferguson had successfully completed hundreds of industrial locations and expansions ranging from international headquarters locations to expansions of companies with fewer than 20 employees.

He had served in economic development positions under former Illinois Gov. Jim Thompson.

Immediately prior to moving to Greeneville in 1992, he was president of the Miami Beacon Council, a nonprofit organization he helped create, that was involved in helping attract industry to Dade County, Fla., which includes the city of Miami and Miami Beach.

FORMED CONSULTING FIRM

Although offered an attractive contract renewal as GCP president in the fall of 2000, Ferguson had announced in November of that year his decision to resign and seek a fresh challenge.

The following month, he announced the formation of Ferguson

Development Network, a Greeneville-based economic development consulting firm to provide professional proj-

ect assistance to manufacturing companies contemplating building a new plant, or expanding or relocating one.

The consulting company worked with a wide variety of clients in numerous geographic locations.