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Lee names ammo salesman to McGhee Tyson Airport’s board

Leaders working on plans to reshape Knoxville site

Mariah Franklin
Knoxville News Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Gov. Bill Lee has picked real estate broker, gun ammunition seller and Tennessee State Board of Education member Jordan Mollenhour to help lead Knoxville’s McGhee Tyson Airport through one of the busiest periods in its history.

Mollenhour co-leads the Knoxville-based Mollenhour Gross investment firm and owns Lucky Gunner, an ammunition company. In 2022, he was approved for a spot on the state board of education as a representative of Tennessee’s 2nd Congressional District, which includes Knoxville. He’ll have some on-the-job learning ahead of him at the airport. McGhee Tyson is changing quickly. Airport leaders

are working on a set of plans to re-shape McGhee Tyson – from terminal furniture to parking garages and airline options – amid population growth in East Tennessee and rising passenger traffic. Mollenhour has never served on the McGhee Tyson board before, unlike most of the other members. He and Blount County Sheriff James Berrong are the only directors chosen so far for

See AIRPORT BOARD, Page 8A

WHAT’S THAT?



A new hotel is under construction on what used to be a parking lot in downtown Maryville.
PHOTOS BY CAITIE MCMEKIN/NEWS SENTINEL

New hotel now under construction in Maryville

Caitlyn Meisner
Knoxville News Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Curiosity often starts with two words, one question: ‘What’s that?’ If you see new construction or anything funky around town, send an email to knowyourknox@knoxnews.com. We’ll work to get you an answer and might even share our findings with Knox News readers!

A new hotel is coming to downtown Maryville thanks to a local developer who’s been dreaming of building there for years. Sandip Patel of Devi Capital, based in Morristown, is bringing a 98-room Holiday Inn to the former parking lot on West Broadway Avenue. The lot is sandwiched between a funeral home and an apartment building, and is just a few steps away from the Capitol Theatre, Raven Steakhouse Lounge and Bluetick Tavern. Patel told Knox News this location was “really suitable” for a hotel and it was the “right location” in Maryville’s downtown district. He noted there were lots of activities in the area, making the lot a perfect hotel space for tourists.

Patel said the development is still in its early stages since breaking ground in 2024. The development will also have a 118-space parking garage to replace the parking lot that used to occupy 202 W. Broadway Ave.

There isn’t an updated timeline on the project and Patel could not provide a date the hotel will start booking reservations. Devi Capital has developed several other East Tennessee hotels, including Fairfield Inn & Suites in Kingsport and Morristown, as well as a Hampton Inn and Holiday Inn Express in Newport.

Caitlyn Meisner is the K-12 education reporter for Knox News. Email tips and story ideas to caitlyn.meisner@knoxnews.com.



A Holiday Inn is under construction at 202 W. Broadway Ave. in Maryville.



‘It feels like freedom’

Former TV anchors launch new marketing firm

Keenan Thomas
Knoxville News Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

The two plan to create a guide for journalists who feel burned out or want to consider working on their own.

Heather Waliga and Abby Ham have started their own marketing firm after working for years as TV anchors and reporters. CAITIE MCMEKIN/NEWS SENTINEL

Last year, Abby Ham and Heather Waliga began cultivating an idea for a new type of personality-driven marketing firm using their cultural cachet, their credibility and their connections across East Tennessee. It’s called We Know People Media, and they’re ready to be the faces who promote local businesses they believe in. They’re betting they can leverage their 20-year TV careers to share the stories of business owners with the communities they serve. The business model combines “traditional marketing with our personality and our following here in East Tennessee,” Ham said in an exclusive interview with Knox News. “It feels like freedom,” Ham said, “like we are in charge of our own destiny now. It’s really scary leaving the corporate life and going into something totally new, but we feel like this sense of excitement around what we’re doing.”

The duo, along with two new employees, have amassed around a dozen clients, including Cazzy’s Corner Grill as well as Markman’s Diamonds, Obligato Boutique, Orange Hat Brewing Company and Rusty Wallace Hyundai. “We’ve been able to showcase the restaurants we love, the fashion we love in a unique way that gets the message out to people that these places are here, but it also provides value,” Ham said.

We Know People Media is a different type of marketing

The two began working on We Know People Media last year, with Ham taking on most of the work after leaving WBIR in January. Waliga followed in her footsteps when she left Knoxville’s NBC affiliate in June, and she’s now hit the

See MARKETING FIRM, Page 9A

