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THE CHAMBER REPORT

A PROSPEROUS FUTURE SOFIDEL GROUP IN VESTS 5350 MILLION IN NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA

SOFIDEL ENDLESS CARE, INNOVATIVE LIFE

FLY LOCAL

TULSA AT SXSW

SCORING BIG WITH BIG 12 WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIP

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National Small Business Week April 30-May 4

Tulsa Small Business Connection: C-Level Lunch May 2

Tulsa Regional Washington D.C. Fly-In May 9-11 Washington, D.C. **Monthly Capitol Luncheon** May 22 | 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Oklahoma State Capitol

Legislative Briefing Breakfast June 1 | 7:30-9 a.m. Hyatt Regency Tulsa

State of Education June 6 | Noon-1:30 p.m. DoubleTree by Hilton Tulsa Downtown

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ON THE COVER: Sofidel Group, an Italian manufacturer of tissue paper, will invest \$360 million in northeast Oklahoma.

Photo by Ben Lindsey, Intent Productions

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BHM INGENIEURE

151 772

by Jarrel Wade

DEE

1.8 million square feet is a great deal of ground to cover.

It's equal to 15 Manhattan city blocks or 30 football fields.

It's a third the size of Vatican City, three times the base of the Great Pyramid of Giza or a fourth of Disneyland – all under one roof.

It's also the size of a new manufacturing plant under construction in Inola.

Sofidel Group, an Italian tissue paper manufacturer, recently broke ground on a massive industrial facility. The \$360 million capital investment in Inola will create 300 jobs in the Rogers County community.

"Sofidel will build here a new, modern integrated plant to serve the south-central and central-western areas of this great country, where we have been operating since 2012," said Luigi Lazzareschi, CEO of Sofidel Group. "I am glad to announce this new greenfield investment...[which] will support our growth in the U.S. significantly."



The 1.8-million-square-feet plant will be almost 40 percent larger than the Macy's Fulfillment Center in north Tulsa County. Expected to be operational by 2020, the plant will have production capacity of 120,000 tons of tissue paper each year.



From a brief Tulsa tour to a \$360 million investment

Andrew Ralston had been a member of the Chamber's economic development team for just eight months when he got a call that would shape his next four years.

He was told to meet a group at Tulsa International Airport and show them potential project sites.

"If it was conveyed that they were CEOs, it wouldn't have been me meeting them," Ralston said.

One of the men he met that day was Sofidel Group CEO Luigi Lazzareschi. Almost four years after their first meeting, Lazzareschi announced his company would invest a third of \$1 billion into the Tulsa region.

"I took them to Evelyn's Soul Food on airport property," Ralston said. "Luigi ordered chicken fried steak."

Ralston showed the Italian CEO several properties, but once Lazzareschi described how much land they were looking for and what his company wanted to build, Ralston realized where they should be going: Inola.

He called Janet Smith, economic development manager with PSO, and within three hours they were walking the field that will become Sofidel's northeast Oklahoma facility.

But before that could happen, there were hundreds of hurdles to overcome.

Sofidel chose "Project Autumn" as the codename for the deal in hopes of finalizing the land acquisition in the fall of 2014, Ralston said. However, that date came and went without a final site.

A year later, PSO was able to accept offers on the Inola River/Rail Site from Sofidel. Grant funds for infrastructure improvements came next, followed by an incentive package from Tulsa's Future regional partners.

"We became the site consultants," Ralston said. "Like a consultant would, we handled the paperwork and gathered all the partners to make development deals come together. The relationships of Chamber staff and Tulsa's Future partners all pushed this past the decision point."

Ralston said the best part about the project for him is the impact Project Autumn will have on the local community. Sofidel's facility, once property taxes reach their full collection, will single-handedly take Inola Public Schools off the state's school funding formula.

"That's just a really good feeling."





"We have been growing year after year at a very fast pace," said Lazzareschi. "I would like to thank all the partners who have supported us in making this new project. They have played an integral role in helping us achieve this goal."

Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin was among the regional, state, federal and business leaders at a ceremonial groundbreaking March 16 to welcome Sofidel Group to northeast Oklahoma.

"We are excited that Sofidel has continued confidence to make this tremendous investment in Oklahoma," said Gov. Fallin. "This global company has seen the advantages Oklahoma provides in its current operation, and now will double down with a state-of-the-art production facility in Inola. This is another example that our economic pro-business policies are diversifying Oklahoma's economy."

Tulsa's Future, the Chamber-led regional economic development partnership supported by public and private investors, coordinated the Sofidel project. "Project Autumn," as it was known prior to the public announcement, involved more partner entities than any in the 13-year history of Tulsa's Future. The third five-year phase of Tulsa's Future, which began in 2016, has now facilitated more than \$675 million of capital investment in northeast Oklahoma, with a goal of \$1.1 billion by 2020.

"An international company like Sofidel locating here is a tribute to Oklahoma's talented manufacturing workforce," said Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Bill John Baker. "Cherokee Nation has established a vital role in attracting



What makes a community competitive for economic development?

Sofidel's investment at PSO's Inola property opens up additional acreage at the site to potential expansions of major industries on a global scale. The gatekeepers to such developments are site location consultants who contract with expanding companies to evaluate potential locations.

Michael Mullis, president and CEO of J.M. Mullis Inc., is one of the most prolific site consultants in the world. Mullis visited Tulsa recently to share insights with Tulsa Regional Chamber staff and Tulsa's Future regional partners.

Mullis said cities that would otherwise win a major project can instead lose it with just a single misstep or delay.

"If you are given the chance to see a deal that can be made, you better be ready," Mullis said. "There's one shot."



A major component of the consultant's work is narrowing down recommended sites to two or three candidates and then turning the decision over to company executives, Mullis said.

"What makes the final decision? Gut feeling, Mullis said. "How does it feel to you as a company? At the end of the day, it will go one way or the other." Mullis said communities must make holistic improvements and offer everything they can to make the list of finalists for a project. Workforce demographics and the company's needs are the major determinants, he said, but local incentives are an important factor right before the finish line.

"Incentives don't make the deal," Mullis said. "They break the tie."

PARTNERS IN PROSPERITY

The Chamber thanks the following partners for their contributions to this incredible achievement:

State of Oklahoma

Oklahoma Department of Commerce

Cherokee Nation

Public Service Company of Oklahoma

ONE Gas

City of Inola

Rogers County

Rogers County Industrial Development Authority

U.S. Economic Development Administration

Indian Nations Council of Governments

Grand Gateway Economic Development Association

> U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality

Oklahoma Department of Transportation

Inola Public Schools

Northeast Technology Center

Mayes County Rural Water District #2

Rural Economic Development of Inola

> Inola Chamber of Commerce

new businesses to rural communities like Inola, where 300 permanent jobs and 500 construction iobs are a blessing to the local economy and schools. We're excited to continue partnering with state and municipal partners to create opportunities like this that benefit the Cherokee Nation and all northeast of Oklahoma."

The Cherokee Nation and other partners provided various incentives and in-kind services to attract Sofidel to the Tulsa region. One of the deciding factors was Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO)'s Inola River/Rail Site, a large-scale industrial property.

"PSO is very pleased to work with state and local partners to bring this game-changing project to northeast Oklahoma," said Stuart Solomon, president and chief operating officer for PSO. "Sofidel's investment will bring much-needed jobs and an economic boost to Inola and the entire region. We are especially proud to be able to provide the site that helps make this project happen."

PSO, along with Rogers County and Inola leadership, invested in site preparation and infrastructure to make the 1,100-acre Inola River/Rail Site available for industrial development. The site was previously the location of a planned but cancelled nuclear power plant.

"This is exactly the type of high-impact project we hoped and expected to attract when we made the Inola River/Rail Site available for economic development," Solomon said. "With easy access by highway, rail and the Verdigris River Navigation Channel, this site is primed to bring even more jobs and investment to the Inola area."

Another leading partner, ONE Gas, helped provide natural gas access to the site, which significantly increased its marketability.

"We are proud to partner with our state, local and business leaders to attract new growth opportunities to the great state of Oklahoma through a highly collaborative economic development strategy," said Pierce Norton, president and CEO of ONE Gas. "We all benefit from our state's abundant natural gas supplies being in close proximity to where the resource



is consumed, which allows our company to deliver reliable, affordable energy to businesses like Sofidel, which also recognizes that energy costs are critical to their company's competitive advantage."

The PSO site is now available for more industrial development after Sofidel's initial investment. Sofidel alone, however, will have a dramatic impact on Rogers County.

"The Sofidel Group thoroughly researched a number of sites across the country before choosing Rogers County and the Inola community," said Rogers County Commissioner Ron Burrows, a key figure in the project's success. "They chose Rogers County because we make good partners and good neighbors. This investment will benefit the entire county for decades to come. I look forward to continuing our close relationship and making Rogers County a great place for great businesses just like Sofidel."

The City of Inola will see a windfall from Sofidel's operations within its city limits.

"Sofidel is going to have a huge impact on Inola and Rogers County, the Inola school system and Northeast Tech, and will eventually create significant benefit through new tax revenues," Inola Mayor Larry Grigg said.

Sofidel's capital investment is the largest in northeast Oklahoma in decades, and it sets the bar even higher for what the Tulsa region can attain.

"Sofidel's investment is a great achievement for both the company and northeast Oklahoma, and a laurel for the Chamber's economic development efforts," said Mike Neal, president and CEO of the Tulsa Regional Chamber. "I commend all the partners involved for their hard work and diligence to secure this project."

State of Education

Featuring Jaime Casap, Global Education Evangelist at Google

Google Search

I'm Feeling Lucky



Jaime is the Global Education Evangelist at Google. Jaime evangelizes the power and potential of technology and the web as enabling and supporting tools in pursuit of promoting inquiry-driven learning models. Jaime collaborates with school systems, educational organizations and leaders focused on building innovation and iteration into our education policies and practices.

June 6, 2018 | Noon-1:30 p.m.

Renaissance Tulsa Hotel & Convention Center 6808 S 107th E Ave, Tulsa, OK 74133

Tickets

\$40 for members \$50 for not-yet members Register @ tulsachamber.com/events













At the Tulsa Regional Chamber's 2018 Annual Meeting in January, newly inaugurated Chair Steve Bradshaw prioritized direct flights as an economic imperative.

"This is an area of great interest and discussion within our business community," Bradshaw said. "And it matters greatly when we work to attract new businesses or compel existing businesses to build out their workforce here rather than in other markets that may enjoy easier business travel."

National competition between communities for sustainable, reliable and convenient air service has never been more intense. As the Tulsa regional economy grows, so does demand for air service. Bradshaw's focus on the issue set into motion the development of a travel policy for local businesses that prioritizes local flights. Working directly with Tulsa International Airport (TIA), the Chamber lent its support to the airport's existing #FlyTulsa campaign with a proposed set of guidelines for member companies.

Increased traffic through TIA makes the case to airlines for additional direct flights to highpriority destinations like New York, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. Business leaders can stimulate additional nonstop air service based on existing demand by pledging their support for and adopting a corporate #Fly-Tulsa travel policy. According to TIA data, only 72 percent of commercial flights booked in the Tulsa area start at Tulsa International Airport, leaving about 1,360 Tulsans every day – equivalent to ten 737s – who travel to another region's airport to start their trip. This equates to nearly half a million passengers annually driving to airports as far as five hours away to travel by air to their final destination.

Bradshaw unveiled the #FlyTulsa business travel policy at the Chamber's February joint board meeting. The policy encourages as many business flights as possible be routed through Tulsa rather than through Oklahoma City, Dallas or other regional airports.

"More sustained passenger traffic through Tulsa International (means) more lobbying power ... when we meet with representatives from American Airlines, Southwest, United, Delta and Frontier about adding direct flights," Bradshaw said.

The policy also makes a bottom-line argument for routing flights locally. According to TIA estimates, the cost of single-day business air travel for Tulsa employees that begins in Dallas surpasses \$470 per trip, which factors in the cost of driving, wasted work hours and overnight parking.

The #FlyTulsa campaign benefits from the momentum of several new direct flights added to Tulsa International Airport since January. Frontier Airlines – the Denver-based, low-fare carrier – began to offer direct service to San Jose, California, and Washington Dulles International Airport on April 10. Newcomer Via Airlines announced Tulsa will have nonstop service to Austin, Texas, beginning May 6.

"We look forward to welcoming Via Airlines to Tulsa in May," said Tulsa International Airport CEO Mark VanLoh. "The addition of daily nonstop service to Austin will further enhance the connection between our two cities and give our passengers one more reason to fly from Tulsa."

"Via Airlines' service to Austin provides business travelers with better access to a regional economic hub, and gives the Tulsa region additional leverage when competing for capital investment," said Chamber President and CEO Mike Neal. "Direct flights rank atop the list of priorities expanding or relocating companies look for when evaluating prospective locations, and this latest flight from Via Airlines will bolster the Tulsa region's economic competitiveness."

Community leaders from all sectors can meaningfully impact Tulsa's opportunity for additional nonstop service. By adopting the #FlyTulsa policy, Chamber members benefit not only their own business, but the strength of the regional economy.

BEGINNING THIS SPRING, TRAVELERS WILL BE ABLE TO FLY TO 22 CITIES (24 AIRPORTS) FROM TULSA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

Atlanta - Delta Austin (May 6) - Via Airlines Baltimore/Washington, D.C. - Allegiant Charlotte - American Chicago O'Hare - American Chicago O'Hare - United Dallas Love - Southwest Dallas/Ft. Worth - American Denver - Southwest Denver - United Denver - United Denver - Frontier Detroit - Delta Houston Hobby- Southwest Houston Intercontinental - United Las Vegas - Allegiant Las Vegas- Southwest Los Angeles - Allegiant Miami - American Minneapolis - Delta Orlando/Sanford - Allegiant Orlando (April 8) - Frontier Orlando (June 9) - Southwest Phoenix- Southwest St. Louis- Southwest Salt Lake City - Delta San Diego (April 8) - Frontier San Jose (April 11) - Frontier Tampa/St. Petersburg - Allegiant Washington D.C. (April 11) - Frontier



To review the policy and join the growing list of businesses choosing to #FlyTulsa, visit **tulsachamber.com**/ **flytulsa**.



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require

TULSA COUNTRY CLUB



BACK-TO-BIG WITH BIG 12 WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIP

In 2017, Tulsa set an attendance record for the Big 12 Wrestling Championship. Oklahoma State claimed its fifth consecutive team title at the tournament, which sold more than 16,000 tickets for the two-day event. The championship had an economic impact of \$1.3 million and gave Tulsa national exposure for its strength as a destination for amateur wrestling competition.



In 2018, both the Cowboys and Tulsa scored back-to-back victories: OSU won its sixth consecutive team title, and Tulsa bested its own attendance record with more than 18,000 tickets sold.

Even before the 2018 tournament, the Big 12 recognized Tulsa as a premier host. In February, the conference extended its contract to host the wrestling championship in Tulsa through 2020.

"Many thanks to the Tulsa Sports Commission, Tulsa Regional Tourism, the BOK Center and all involved in the commitment to the Big 12 in staging a championship wrestling event that is second to none," said Big 12 Associate Commissioner Bob Burda. "The recognition of this commitment is reflected in the twoyear contract extension to stage our wrestling championship in Tulsa through 2020. We look forward to growing our hosting partnership with Tulsa and continuing the success of this great event."

Housed at the Tulsa Regional Chamber, Tulsa Regional Tourism is an umbrella organization that administers VisitTulsa, the city's convention and visitors bureau; the Tulsa Office of Film, Music, Arts & Culture, an accredited film commission; and the Tulsa Sports Commission, which markets Tulsa as a destination for amateur sporting events.

"One of the goals of Tulsa Regional Tourism is to promote Tulsa as a leading destination for visitors," said Ray Hoyt, senior vice president of regional tourism at the Tulsa Regional Chamber. "We do that through developing strong relationships to secure top-tier events like the Big 12 Wrestling Championship."

The Big 12 Wrestling Championship is the largest neutral-site wrestling conference championship in the NCAA.

"On behalf of the Tulsa Sports Commission and our local tourism partners, we appreciate the Big 12 for believing in our ability to host the coveted championship for another two years," said Vince Trinidad, executive director of the Tulsa Sports Commission. "We've worked long and hard to bring this conference to Tulsa."

While fans only see two days of actual competition, bidding and planning for the tournament take years. The Tulsa Sports Commission won its first bid to host the 2017 and 2018 Big 12 Wrestling Championships in 2015. Leading up to the event, Chamber staff coordinate everything from marketing, hospitality arrangements and volunteer recruitment, all to ensure the community's

excitement about, and enjoyment of, the championship.

"It wouldn't have happened without the collaboration among our regional tourism community and private investors, and the quality of amenities and hospitality we have in northeast Oklahoma," said Trinidad.

These quality amenities include nationally acclaimed venues like the BOK Center.

"SMG is thrilled to extend our partnership with the Big 12 Conference to host their wrestling championship at the BOK Center through 2020," said Jeff Nickler, general manager of the BOK Center/Cox Business Center, an SMG-managed facility. "We are proud to be part of this marquee event and look forward to providing an exceptional experience for the thousands of student athletes and fans who visit our city. Through constant collaboration with VisitTulsa and the Tulsa Sports Commission, SMG is committed to bringing top-caliber sporting events to the Tulsa region."

With an estimated economic impact of \$1.5 million, Hoyt believes the 2018 tournament set Tulsa on a winning trajectory for the next two years.

"We know that the Tulsa hospitality community will continue to provide an excellent experience for athletes, coaches and fans."



TULSA AT SXSW 2018



FILM, MUSIC, ARTS & CULTURE

Tulsa FMAC makes its presence at South by Southwest known

The Tulsa Office of Film, Music, Arts & Culture (Tulsa FMAC) continues to grow its annual presence at the South by Southwest (SXSW) Conference & Festival, an internationally prestigious event celebrating the convergence of the interactive, film and music industries. For the fourth year in a row, a contingent of Tulsa-area artists, musicians and entrepreneurs descended on Austin, Texas, for the ten-day festival. "I have loved watching the Tulsa lineups become must-see events at SXSW," said Ray Hoyt, senior vice president of tourism at the Tulsa Regional Chamber. "Tulsa consistently sells out performances at our music venues, and it's great to see our one-of-a-kind music scene expanding to an internationally known event in Austin. Our commitment to promoting these creative industries and showcasing Tulsa's talent is a top priority."



SXSW is Tulsa FMAC's signature opportunity to promote the region's creative prowess outside of Oklahoma. Tulsa FMAC returned to the 2018 festival with three distinct offerings: the official SXSW Tulsa Music Showcase and the Tulsa Boom Factory official SXSW day party, both on March 15; and the Created in Tulsa trade show booth March 11-14. Each promoted Tulsa to the world as a creative and cultural hub, and a top U.S. music destination.

"Our marketing efforts and consistency with SXSW continue to make Tulsa a known brand," said Abby Kurin, director of Tulsa FMAC. "Having so many people at the festival represent Tulsa continues to solidify not just our name, but the talent that can be found in our city."

Tulsa's consistency has paid off. Just before the 2018 festival, the official festival magazine SXSWorld had rave reviews for northeast Oklahoma and its "hotbed of music talent and tradition":









"Look at recent Americana charts and you can't miss the growing presence of Oklahoma artists. There's the unflinchingly raw songwriting of [2016 Tulsa Boom Factory performer] John Moreland, a DIY upstart who made the jump to influential British label 4AD for last year's "Big Bad Luv." There's the country rock of Turnpike Troubadours, whose two straight Billboard Top 5 country albums earned a coveted Austin City Limits TV segment. There's former Troubadours member John Fullbright, a Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter who'll bring a cast of his friends to SXSW this year as part of a Tulsa music showcase."

The most recognized creative brands in the world turn their attention to Austin during SXSW, which has become a signature marketing effort for filmmakers, bands and startups. In an attempt to "hijack" that attention, hundreds of concerts and parties occur co-incident to, but not officially sanctioned by, the actual festival. Tulsa's SXSW presence is unique in its official standing, which grants the city visibility and promotion from the festival itself.

"People look for us at the trade show and make sure we host music events," said Kurin. "It's what SXSW attendees have come to expect."

Tulsa's history at SXSW began in 2015, when Tulsa FMAC launched the overwhelmingly successful Tulsa Boom Factory. The 2016 Boom Factory featured the late Tulsa music legend Leon Russell in one of his final live performances. Also in 2016, efforts expanded to include the Created in Tulsa trade show booth, introducing a unique platform to promote Tulsa's innovative entrepreneurs, creative industries and arts organizations to more than 65,000 festival attendees. In 2017, Tulsa FMAC debuted the official SXSW Tulsa Music Showcase with a headliner performance by Hanson. "We're able to put together Tulsa's foot forward in Austin," said Hoyt. "Tulsa's the only city represented in Oklahoma with a showcase. We're talking about Tulsa's creative class to an international audience."





More than 85 musicians, volunteers and entrepreneurs traveled to SXSW with Tulsa FMAC as ambassadors for northeast Oklahoma. Tulsa FMAC's most valuable contribution is the organization and direction, marshalling those ambassadors as a singular force whose collective impact benefits both the individual and the whole Tulsa region. By unifying and amplifying what would otherwise be fragmented and disjointed voices, Tulsa FMAC builds a critical mass that furthers Tulsa's brand as a region steeped in creativity.

As SXSWorld illustrated:

"...the production assistance of [John] Fullbright [lured] rising roots-country band American Aquarium from their North Carolina home base to Tulsa in late 2017 to make their upcoming album. Band leader B.J. Barham says he's impressed at the bonds between artists that have transcended stylistic boundaries.

"'They just look at it as music,' Barham says. 'A lot of those folks are just friends, and they don't look at it as genres. It's more of a scene, and that's a cool thing.'"

That scene draws thousands of visitors a year to Tulsa, and Tulsa FMAC aims to grow its impact.

"People compare us to either the next Austin or the next Nashville, and certainly we take that as a compliment," Kurin told SXSWorld. "But if you look back on what Tulsa has been doing and Oklahoma as a whole, it's always had that rich history."



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AT THE S





GROWING TULSA'S TALENT POOL Event series promotes Tulsa to interns

Like much of the nation, the Tulsa region faces a talent shortage. Despite low unemployment rates, employers struggle to find qualified applicants. More jobs require specialized training and credentials than ever before. According to Lumina Foundation, the nation's largest private foundation focused on increasing America's success in higher education, two-thirds of all jobs will require some kind of postsecondary education by 2020.

To help meet the region's talent needs, the Tulsa Regional Chamber has committed to tackling the challenge head-on. In addition to cultivating local talent, one way to address the issue is to recruit people to the region who already have degrees. For many college juniors and seniors who have yet to finalize their post-graduation plans, their first exposure to a professional life in Tulsa is often through an internship.

"After speaking with and surveying area employers, we realized that finding interns isn't the challenge – it's keeping them in Tulsa after their internship is over," said Maggie Hoey, executive director of Tulsa's Young Professionals (TYPros). "To reverse this trend, we teamed up with the mayor's office to better connect interns to the city in hopes that they start planting roots here during their internship."

This summer, TYPros and the City of Tulsa will launch the Intern in Tulsa series to show interns from local companies why Tulsa is a great place to live and work. Formerly, Intern In Tulsa was a Chamber program that matched prospective interns with companies. TYPros has shifted its focus to keeping existing interns rooted in Tulsa.

The event series will provide interns with social experiences outside of work, as well as networking and professional development opportunities. Events will include Tulsa Drillers games, a tour of the Gathering Place and a service day. TYPros and members of the mayor's office will encourage businesses to get involved by hosting networking lunches and attending events like a kick-off night with Mayor Bynum.

"Tulsa's ability to attract the best and brightest young minds is vital to our continued



economic success," said Kian Kamas, chief of economic development for the City of Tulsa. "A vibrant internship experience is often the deciding factor as graduates evaluate the city in which they will launch their career. We are thrilled to partner with TYPros and the Chamber to launch this summer internship program, and to help showcase the many reasons why Tulsa offers one of the brightest futures for young professionals and recent graduates."

Intern In Tulsa's ultimate aim is to increase the percentage of adults in the region with at least an associate's degree, one of the key metrics of Tulsa's Future. Many graduates assume there are better opportunities in bigger cities, an underlying cause of the exodus of young talent from mid-sized cities like Tulsa. Intern In Tulsa hopes to expose these potential residents to opportunities and experiences that give them a reason to stay.

"TYPros' mission is to attract and retain young talent in Tulsa," says Hoey. "College interns are ideal targets because they are mobile and thinking about where they want to live and work after they graduate. With Intern In Tulsa, we're trying to put Tulsa alongside Austin or Denver on the list of cities they consider living in after graduation. We think the best way to do this is through social connections with other young people and engagement with our city's leaders."

By curating experiences that show what makes Tulsa a special and thriving community, Intern In Tulsa will play an important role in making Tulsa a place that young people choose to live.

How you can help:

You can help keep young talent in Tulsa by informing your interns about this event series and encouraging them to get involved. If you or someone at your company would like more information, please email Maggie Hoey at maggiehoey@typros.org.

TYPROS



D&I 101:

INTERNAL

As you begin to hear more and more about companies building diverse workforces and embracing diversity and inclusion initiatives, many employees wonder if the company is serious about change or simply checking a box. D&I consultants and speakers like me are brought in to begin the uncomfortable conversations and get everyone open and excited. When all is said and done, most employees want to know two things: is this really a safe space where I can show up authentically, and is my diversity really seen as a strength?

In my experience, some companies are sincere and some are not. They may feel forced into acceptance of D&I because of lawsuits or bad PR, and that is never a great start to any company initiative. A company that truly understands the changing economy actually embraces building a diverse workforce for their business success as well as social responsibility.

Stephen Covey once said, "Strength lies in differences, not in similarities."

From a social responsibility standpoint, allowing your employees to show up authentically changes the game in your company culture. Happier employees are also more productive employees. Employers hire people because of the skill set they will bring to the company, but then strip them of the freedom to be creative through conformity. It's important to have policies and rules in place, but it's also important to create a space that allows people to flourish. It starts with allowing people to show up authentically and helping them see their diversity as a strength. Do this by encouraging your employees not to be afraid to show and speak about their diversity. This transparency will lead to a work environment that is more open and comfortable for everyone.

Companies that don't embrace diversity and inclusion today will certainly miss out, but companies that don't embrace diversity and inclusion in the near future will become obsolete.

FEATURED ARTIST Brian Nhir

A Tulsa native and Oral Roberts University graduate, Brian Nhira captivated national audiences as a contestant on "The Voice." Videos of his performances on the show, as well as his subsequently released music videos, have racked up millions of views on YouTube. Passionate about music's transformative power, Nhira has traveled across the U.S. and abroad to inspire and motivate students with a message of hope. Nhira was a featured artist at the 2018 Tulsa Boom Factory at SXSW.











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EXECUTIVE CONNECTIONS

Tulsa Small Business Connection expands offerings for small business owners

Owning a small business can be a lonely affair. From long hours to learning new skills on the fly, small business ownership is a unique endeavor. Small business executives share a comradery in their experiences, and connections between peers can be invaluable on a personal and professional level.

The Tulsa Regional Chamber is committed to fostering these peer-to-peer networks. Through the Tulsa Small Business Connection, the Chamber has grown its current CEO programming and created several new opportunities for small business owners and entrepreneurs.

Chamber members rate CEO Roundtables as one of the Connection's best programs. These groups of eight noncompetitive business owners meet monthly to share best practices and exchange ideas. In practice, roundtables serve as a peer advisory board.

Angela Byers, principal of Byers Creative, has been involved in CEO Roundtables for several years. She says she remains involved because of the impact it has on her and her business.

"Regardless of our diverse industries, products or services, as small business owners we all face similar challenges and can learn from each other," said Byers. "In my opinion, it's the most valuable program the Chamber offers to small business owners. Since I joined four years ago, my group has helped me through an expansion into a new market, dealing with specific employee issues and learning how to more effectively lead my organization."

Building on the success of CEO Roundtables, the Connection launched C-Level Lunch in May 2017. The program connects a group of three to four small business owners over a casual meal. Whereas roundtables meet regularly, C-Level Lunches are one-time meetings between business owners, although follow up discussion is always welcome and encouraged.

C-Level Lunch has seen participation increase and received positive feedback since its inception.

"I started attending C-Level Lunch in order to network with other local business owners on



a more personal level," said Kathleen Pence, owner and president of Pence Law Firm. "I have been encouraged by and learned from my fellow business owners. The spirit of the C-Level Lunch has been positive and supportive, which was a pleasant surprise."

While these two programs provide value to business owners in different ways, the Connection recently created a new opportunity for small businesses: access to owners and CEOs of large companies.

In March, the Connection launched C-Suite Connections, a free program that connects small business executives with peers at larger organizations. The Connection reached out to large businesses in Tulsa such as PSO, Commerce Bank, Manhattan Construction and others, and compiled a list of business advisors. When a small business owner signs up for C-Suite Connections, they are asked to describe the current challenges they face or areas of their business in need of help. The Connection then matches them with the owner of a large business to meet for one hour to share advice.

The Connection's goal is to provide the greatest value to Chamber small business

members. Its programs for executives provide tailored resources that strengthen individual small businesses. Combined with diverse offerings for small business employees, the Connection's programs for executives provide a greater impact to strengthen the Tulsa region's small business community.

TULSASMALLBUSINESS

CONNECTION POWERED BY THE TULSA REGIONAL CHAMBER



To get involved with any of the Connection's programs, visit tulsasbc.com.

Federal Advocacy

OneVoice priorities address infrastructure modernization, workforce training

"It's time to invest in a 21st century infrastructure system to support and grow our 21st century economy."

On Jan. 18, U.S. Chamber President and CEO Tom Donohue issued a call to action to attendees of the America's Infrastructure Summit: it's time to modernize.

"It's time to embrace innovation and equip our critical infrastructure with the technology that will improve efficiency, productivity, and safety. And it's time to approach this as a national imperative for long-term growth and competitiveness."

The OneVoice Regional Legislative Agenda contains policy priorities that support this infrastructure modernization. The agenda is endorsed by a Tulsa Regional Chamberled coalition of 75 northeast Oklahoma business and industry groups, economic development organizations, and municipalities and counties. These entities agree that infrastructure is critical to economic



prosperity, and that policymakers must ensure its long-term vitality.

The 2018 agenda highlights two major northeast Oklahoma infrastructure projects in dire need of funding. The Tulsa-West Tulsa Levee System is in need of a \$34-million rehabilitation, according to Tulsa County, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ranks it among the most at-risk systems in the country. The McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System (MKARNS) links northeast Oklahoma businesses to international ports, and the Corps has identified a \$155 million maintenance backlog for the waterway.

In 2016, Congress passed the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act, which authorizes federal infrastructure work across the country, including on the Tulsa levees and MKARNS. However, funding has yet to be appropriated for these projects.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION

Funding woes also hamper surface transportation infrastructure. Federal gas and diesel taxes that support the Highway Trust Fund have not increased in 25 years. Inflation and increased fuel economy since the tax began have eroded its value. The fund now faces a \$138 billion shortfall over the next decade if left alone.

The U.S. Chamber advocates for a 25-cent increase to the tax spread across five $% \left({{{\rm{T}}_{{\rm{T}}}} \right)$

years. According to a U.S. Chamber report, increasing the federal fuel tax by 25 cents would cost the average motorist \$9 per month but would significantly improve deteriorating roads, which cost the same motorist an estimated \$40 per month.

In Oklahoma, the OneVoice Regional Legislative Agenda calls for an increase to the state gas and diesel tax to match surrounding states. Increasing the tax would provide a more sustainable revenue source for transportation and support the OneVoice legislative priority to maintain and augment critically needed funding for Oklahoma's roads and bridges.

The U.S. Chamber also recommends policy changes to allow and encourage more public-private partnerships on infrastructure improvements.

Tulsa leads by example on this front with a plan to complete the Gilcrease Expressway as a toll route. A public-private partnership was announced last year that involves the City of Tulsa, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, Tulsa County and the U.S. Department of Transportation, among a number of other regional public partners.



Project leaders anticipate a total cost of \$300 million, with yet-to-be-determined private partners covering more than \$100 million. That private expense would be reimbursed through the toll. The approach could become a national model for how public-private partnerships work to complete major public projects.

WORKFORCE TRAINING

If a modernization of America's infrastructure is on the horizon, the country will need to also invest in its workforce.

"Nearly 80 percent of construction firms report that they are having a hard time finding qualified workers," said Donohue. "At the same time, by some estimates, every \$1 million in additional infrastructure spending means an additional six to seven construction jobs. Who is going to fill those positions?"

In Oklahoma, 55 percent of the labor market contains middle-skill jobs, but only 47 percent of the state's workers have the CareerTech or short-term training needed for such positions. This is also true nationwide, where 54 percent of jobs are middleskill, but only 44 percent of workers qualify for such jobs. Thirty-six million American adults lack the skills necessary to fill the jobs that already exist, to say nothing of the jobs that will be needed further into the 21st century.

Several OneVoice priorities address America's talent needs. Pell Grants have been valuable tools for helping students in low- and middle-income families attend traditional degree programs. Pell Grant eligibility is currently limited to programs covering two-thirds of an academic year, or 16 credit hours. This restriction was established before shorter-term credentials were as imperative for industry as they are today. Removing this restriction would help to build a much-needed talent pipeline for Oklahoma companies.

Pell Grant funding is also in jeopardy. Pell Grants have failed to keep up with the



growing costs of college, and the gap between individual Pell awards and college costs has been widening since 1975. Moving forward, strengthening the program would ensure it continues to offer access to higher education and economic opportunity.

The Chamber and its OneVoice coalition partners continue to champion the business case for infrastructure modernization and workforce training. Federal investments in these priorities will have a profound impact on the northeast Oklahoma economy.



Advocate in Washington

As the Chamber's signature federal advocacy event, the Tulsa Regional Washington D.C. Fly-In is of the utmost importance for federal OneVoice legislative priorities. This three-day event offers top-level business executives and regional leaders a direct connection to Oklahoma's federal delegation, as well as a unique opportunity to gain valuable insight from some of the nation's top policy experts. Other highlights of the trip will include lunch with U.S. Senator James Lankford in the Members' Room of the Library of Congress and a Potomac River dinner cruise aboard the National Elite yacht.

May 9-11 Register @ tulsachamber.com/events

SMALL BUSINESS CONNECTION

ERIC SANDERS President and producer

INTENT PRODUCTIONS

When was your business established? Intent Productions was founded February 2014.

What made you decide to open your small business? There were a lot of reasons. One reason was to gain more control and freedom over my life at an early age. Second, after years of earning my video production degree and sharpening my skills in the corporate world, I believed all I needed was the right moment with the right team, and I would succeed. Lastly, my business partners (Evan Gabbin and Ben Lindsey) and I were inspired by the entrepreneurial spirit within the black community that once existed and thrived before the race riots of 1921. It's our hope that we, along with other minority business owners in this city, will inspire other minorities to take a chance on their dreams and build a business of their own.

What are the greatest challenges associated with small business owner-

ship? I'm sure it's different for everyone, but for me it's mental toughness and patience. Running a small business is a faith walk. There was no guarantee we would be where we are today. There was a lot of uncertainty along the way. Through the support of friends and family, and by focusing on what can go right rather than what can go wrong, we allowed ourselves as well as our business to grow. We are still growing, and we continue to trust the process.

What do you find most rewarding about operating a small business? Witnessing the growth. Starting out can seem a bit chaotic, and you'll find yourself throwing ideas against the wall and seeing what sticks. Sooner or later, you begin to see what works and what doesn't. Regardless, good or bad, success or failure – it's all part of the process. Knowing you are on the road to achieving your dreams and goals feels great.

What advice would you give to any would-be small business owners considering starting a business in the Tulsa area? Go for it! Establish a vision, set goals, celebrate your small accomplishments, learn from your mistakes, constantly improve your product/service and NET-WORK until you don't have to introduce yourself. Become a member of the Tulsa Small Business Connection and 36 Degrees North. Tulsa has many organizations committed to the success of small businesses. The resources are here.

How do your small business beginnings impact your passion for being a leader for the next generation of small businesses? We started Intent Productions from humble beginnings. No loans, no equipment, no money and no experience running a small business. All we had was a vision and the desire to build together. I believe in short-term sacrifice for long-term gain and working together as a community. We've demonstrated that it's possible to build a successful business with little to no resources through teamwork.

What personal trait contributes the most to your success? If I had to choose one personal trait, I would say perseverance. I believe in patience and never quitting.

In what ways do you work on your business instead of just in your business? Constantly improving our sales funnel, improving our marketing strategies, evaluating new markets, researching new cameras/equipment that will better help tell our clients' stories, searching for networking opportunities, and continuously investing in business training and mentorship.

What was your greatest learning moment since starting your business? When beginning a small business, most times you are limited in resources. You lack support, funds, equipment and experience. You sometimes have to rely on the bare minimum. It's not a matter of what you have, but what you have inside of you. If you are dedicated, passionate and resourceful, you have enough to begin.

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