



# **Community Leadership Visit**

# **Chattanooga, Tennessee**

**July 23-25, 1998**

## Background . . . Discover Springfield in Chattanooga!

“People come to Chattanooga to discover themselves.” So says David Crockett, chairman of the Chattanooga City Council and descendant of another famous Tennessean with the same name. In many ways, that is an appropriate description of the goal of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce community leadership visit program. We travel to another community to learn from their experiences and, in the process, we invariably discover something about our own community. This year was no different.

Forty-one Springfield area business, civic, and governmental leaders participated in the Chamber’s fifth annual community leadership visit on July 23 - 25, 1998. Chattanooga was the destination for this year’s visit, with a program agenda which included a special focus on sustainable development, center city revitalization and the Tennessee Aquarium.



The story of Chattanooga’s environmental and economic turnaround is what attracts numerous community leadership delegations (like ours) to the southeastern Tennessee city on missions of research and self-discovery, as Crockett put it. Chattanooga has received international acclaim for its achievements in recent years.

Once listed by the Environmental Protection Agency as the most polluted city in the United States, Chattanooga is now a model for sustainable development concepts and practices. The city has passed all federal standards for air quality since 1988 and it now looks at economic development and environmental protection as integrated and obtainable community goals.

Chattanooga’s downtown revival has been spurred by the highly-successful Tennessee Aquarium, which attracts nearly 1.5 million visitors annually. The Tennessee Aquarium is one of

the prototypes for Springfield's American National Fish and Wildlife Living Museum and Aquarium, now in the planning stages.

The three-day community leadership visit program also included discussions with Chattanooga area officials about tourism and visitor attraction marketing, public transportation initiatives, and the work of the community foundation and other private foundations located in Chattanooga.

The following Springfield area community leaders participated in the Chattanooga visit:

**Benjamin Alexander**, City of Springfield  
**Jim Anderson**, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce  
**Pamela Anderson**, James River Basin Partnership  
**Howard Bailey**, Howard Bailey Company  
**Rob Baird** Concrete Company of Springfield  
**Jim Baker**, Southwest Missouri State University  
**Brad Bodenhausen**, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce  
**Leigh Branson-Daniels**, Springfield/Branson Regional Airport  
**Lance T. Brown**, Urban Districts Alliance  
**Pam Buck**, City of Springfield  
**Steve Burch**, NationsBank  
**Geoff Butler**, Butler, Rosenbury & Partners  
**Bob Chancellor**, Springfield City Council  
**Sheila Collins**, Stone Container Corporation  
**Bill Compere**, Compere & Robinette, CPA's  
**David Coonrod**, Greene County Commission  
**Andy Dalton**, City Utilities of Springfield  
**Gary Deaver**, City Utilities Advisory Council  
**Gary Ellison**, Friends of the Museum  
**Tom Finnie**, City of Springfield  
**Lee Gannaway**, Mayor, City of Springfield  
**Diane Gillespie**, Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau  
**Bud Greve**, Springfield Public Schools  
**Conrad Griggs**, Springfield City Council  
**Susan Hoechst**, Priority Management  
**Jan Horton**, Community Foundation of the Ozarks  
**Tracy Kimberlin**, Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau  
**Mary Lilly Smith**, City of Springfield  
**Martin MacDonald**, Bass Pro Shops  
**Mary Kay Meek**, Meeks Building Centers  
**Lisa Nally**, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce  
**Richard Ollis**, Ollis & Company  
**Lance Renner**, Ozarks Technical Community College  
**Bill Reser**, Springfield Board of Public Utilities  
**Russell Rhodes**, Springfield City Council  
**John Rush**, United Way of the Ozarks  
**Nikki Sells**, Express Personnel Services  
**George Thompson**, Thompson Sales Company  
**Bob Vanaman**, Springfield City Council  
**Steve Vaught**, Southwestern Bell Telephone Company  
**Shelia Wright**, Springfield City Council

# Our Findings . . . The Chattanooga Story

## Chapter 1: Sustainable Development

The story of Chattanooga's emergence as a model for sustainable development is rooted in the city's history. In 1969, the federal government named Chattanooga "the dirtiest city in America." It was a community with an economy heavily based in industry. TNT factories and steel foundries were predominant and the resulting smog encircled the city on most days. As Chattanooga worked to clean up the environment and its image, a concept for its future developed -- sustainability.

We heard several different definitions of sustainable development. A Native American proverb says, "Consider the next seven generations' future and learn from the seven generations' past." Some define it as leaving the environment in the same shape as you found it. Others say sustainability occurs when there is "zero waste" in a community. In Chattanooga, sustainability is more of an attitude. It is an attitude which places supreme value on integrated thinking, long-term vision, and inclusive community involvement.

David Crockett says a community cannot consider issues like education, transportation, economic development and the environment separately. Though federal and state governments operate that way, he believes local communities must integrate these issues. For Chattanooga, that integration includes looking at Ecology/Economy/Equity as a whole as the community charts its future course. The result of this mindset in Chattanooga is a feeling that economic development and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive community goals.

While sustainability is certainly a noble concept, in many places it is just a concept. But in Chattanooga, we saw examples of this concept in practice. One of the most visible examples of sustainability in Chattanooga is the electric shuttle bus system. The Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority operates a 15-bus fleet which runs on a continuous circuit through a 16-block area of Chattanooga's center city. Shuttle rides are free-of-charge and available every five

minutes at the 29 stops along the route. The system is financed primarily by revenue from two downtown parking facilities which serve as the north and south terminals for the shuttle buses.

An example of integrated problem solving, the electric shuttle bus system has successfully addressed numerous community needs for Chattanooga. Obviously, the electric buses are much more environmentally friendly than their diesel counterparts. The electric buses attract high numbers of riders (600,000 per year) and have dramatically improved usage of Chattanooga's previously underutilized public transit system. The shuttle system has helped address the parking challenge faced by center city tourist and visitor attractions. The system also has been an economic boon for Chattanooga since the local company which builds the buses, Advanced Vehicle Systems, has become an international supplier of electric buses.

Another example of sustainable development is the Finley Stadium project in Chattanooga's Southside Business District. Designed and built as the southern anchor of downtown, the \$28 million stadium with a seating capacity of 20,000, is home to University of Tennessee-Chattanooga football, state high school football playoff games, and soccer at both the amateur and professional levels. But in addition to its positive economic impact on the community, the Finley Stadium complex has had a positive environmental impact as well. An adjacent building which formerly housed a steel foundry has been reclaimed and developed into a plaza area for tailgate parties and other gatherings. The stadium complex also features porous parking pavement which drains runoff water into a holding tank so it can be re-circulated for irrigation on the property.



Chattanooga's future holds promise for two other projects which employ the concept of sustainability. Also in the Southside, an ecological/industrial area called "Smart Park" is in the planning and development stages. Fifteen businesses are researching the feasibility of this area in which the waste stream of one business could be the raw material for another, thereby eliminating waste and creating a continuous loop of resources among the businesses. Also on the drawing board is the "Chatlanta" project – a high-speed rail connection between the Chattanooga and Atlanta airports. This innovative idea is designed to solve the problems of overcrowding at Hartsfield International Airport in Atlanta and under-utilization of the Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport.

## **Chapter 2: Partnerships for a Better Downtown**

A very visible aspect of Chattanooga's community turnaround is the new vitality and excitement in the heart of the city. Downtown Chattanooga is now a thriving "destination" thanks to a community vision and creative leadership in implementing that vision. The leadership for Chattanooga's downtown has come in the form of public-private partnerships.

The primary organization promoting center city development is called the Chattanooga Downtown Partnership. This partnership is funded by an annual \$100,000 grant from the City of Chattanooga and \$400,000 in annual support from local foundations and corporations. The work of the Chattanooga Downtown Partnership focuses on two major areas: business development and special events.



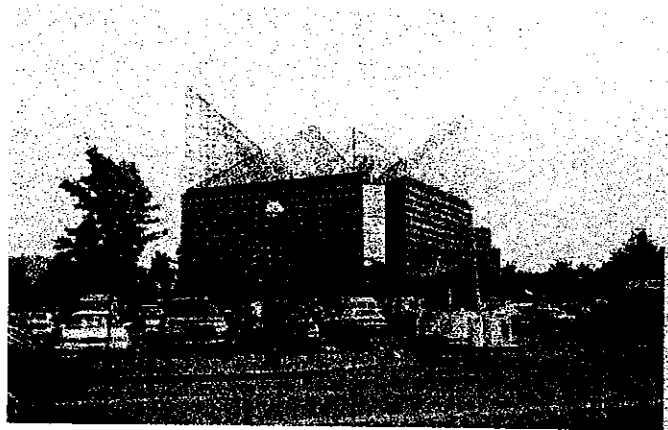
The Business Development Department serves as the information arm of the Chattanooga Downtown Partnership. This department maintains an updated list of available properties in the center city area and acts as a reference center for potential developers, without getting directly involved in the real estate negotiations. The partnership also operates a "New Business Welcome Program" to build goodwill among downtown businesses. Another area of concentration has been added to respond to an emerging trend toward downtown shopping centers. To capitalize on that trend, the Chattanooga Downtown Partnership now participates in the International Council of Shopping Centers organization.

When it comes to special events in downtown Chattanooga, the partnership focuses on flexibility and frequency. The Chattanooga Downtown Partnership sponsors five major event programs that attract more than 200,000 people annually to downtown. Their goal is to make coming downtown more of a habit for people. To feed that habit, the partnership concentrates its efforts on a seasonal series of events rather than one-time events. Two summer programs, the Friday lunch-hour "Rhythm and Noon Concert Series" and the Friday evening "Nightfall Concert Series" were in full swing as the Springfield delegation visited Chattanooga. All of the events are free and held at the same place (Miller Plaza). All of the events are fully funded by corporate sponsorships. No tax dollars are used for the special events program.



### Chapter 3: The Tennessee Aquarium and Tourism Marketing

The northern anchor of Chattanooga's downtown is the Tennessee Aquarium. The aquarium opened in May 1992 with a projected attendance for the first year of 650,000. Actual attendance that first year was 1.5 million and the aquarium has been exceeding expectations ever since.



During its first year of operations, the aquarium had a \$135 million economic impact on Chattanooga. The Tennessee Aquarium employs 120 full-time staff and another 130 part-time employees during the busy summer season.

Set up as a 501(c)(3) corporation, the facility cost \$45 million to construct; an amount raised entirely from private funds. The State of Tennessee provided an additional \$9 million for the plaza surrounding the aquarium. The aquarium does not do annual fundraising.



In 1996, the aquarium complex added a 3-D IMAX Theater as a nearby separate facility which was financed by a \$14 million bond issue. The IMAX has turned out to be a very good business decision for the Tennessee Aquarium. It has added another entertainment option to the complex which gives visitors something to do while waiting for the timed ticket to enter the aquarium. Sometimes the wait is as much as two hours. The aquarium continues to draw well



over 1 million visitors annually and the IMAX attracts an average of 650,000 each year. Total revenue this year for both facilities is expected to be \$15 million.

One of the most popular attractions at the aquarium is an area for rotating exhibits which currently houses a fascinating display of jellyfish. Aquarium officials said they intend to change exhibits in this space every two years. This display area provides a new experience for local visitors and offers more incentive for non-local visitors to plan a return trip to the aquarium. (This rotating exhibit space was not in the original design for the aquarium but was modified from an area designed to be permanent exhibit space. Aquarium officials said they wish they had planned for this space from the beginning.)

“The Jellies” are a \$1 million exhibit which, aquarium officials estimate, accounts for an additional 50 - 75,000 visitors each year. They also said that the novelty of a saltwater exhibit tank is the key to attract land-locked visitors to the aquarium, but once visitors are there the freshwater exhibits are very popular too.



Tourism and visitor attraction marketing in Chattanooga is a team effort. That spirit of partnership and collaboration is exhibited in both cooperative funding and marketing messages. The aquarium has a \$2 million marketing budget this year and it also utilizes some cooperative advertising with the Chattanooga Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. The CVB has a total budget this year of \$3.3 million, funded by a four-percent room tax, 700 CVB members which pay annual dues of at least \$150 each, Hamilton County funding, a Southeastern Tennessee Tourism Association advertising cooperative, and cooperative funds from the state.

As a point of comparison, the Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau has a 1998 budget of \$1.4 million funded by a two-percent room tax, "pay-to-play" cooperative advertising and cooperative state funds. The Springfield CVB has no membership fees. Another difference between the two CVBs is use of volunteers. In Springfield, CVB volunteers staff the visitor center but the Chattanooga Area CVB does not use volunteers for that, or any other, function.

The Chattanooga marketing strategy is targeted to regional visitors in an effort to attract extended weekends or mini-vacations. Because many visitors to Chattanooga currently spend only one night in town, the specific goal is to extend the length of overnight stays. Chattanooga is within a two-hour drive of Atlanta, Birmingham, Knoxville and Nashville and about 25 percent of aquarium visitors come from Atlanta. For the cooperative advertising, the primary medium is television. In recent years, the marketing focus has shifted away from promoting just the Tennessee Aquarium to promoting all of the tourist attractions in Chattanooga.

## Conclusion . . . How did they do it?

So what is the moral of the Chattanooga story? The closing speaker of our program probably best summarized the keys to Chattanooga's success. Pete Cooper, executive director of the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, identified five characteristics that stand out about his community. The first two features are common themes we have mentioned in this report: public-private partnerships; and inclusive community decision-making.

"In Chattanooga, you can't make major decisions without everyone at the table," he said. He added that the process is sometimes slow, chaotic and painful. But at the end of such an inclusive process, everyone is "on the same page." In fact, community leaders in Chattanooga carry and often refer to a card that contains "Chattanooga's Belief Statement." So they are, literally, on the same page.

But it is more than their commitment to a shared vision that has led to Chattanooga's success. Other keys to community progress, according to Cooper, include Chattanooga's "can-do" spirit; ego-less leadership; and an ability to look at people as resources. The whole notion that this community-building process is continuous was apparent in Chattanooga. The inclusive visioning and planning process has produced many outstanding results, but it doesn't stop with each individual achievement. Instead, the momentum just continues into and beyond the next project. As Pete Cooper concluded, "now it's a way of life for Chattanooga."

## **Our Recommendations . . . Where do we go from here?**

The five characteristics outlined by Pete Cooper were certainly a recipe for success in Chattanooga and they are worthy guideposts for the Springfield area as well. In some ways, seeing what Chattanooga has done validates many things we are already doing here. We returned home with a renewed sense of the value of public-private partnerships and a reaffirmation of the Springfield-Greene County Vision 20/20 planning process: We must continue our commitment to these worthwhile programs.

Our specific program segments also provided a few ideas that might benefit the Springfield area. Relating to sustainability, Chattanooga's commitment to preserving old buildings for new uses is a form of "community recycling" we could better emulate here. And as we study the feasibility and appropriate location for a second industrial park in Springfield, we should emphasize Best Management Practices so that economic development and environmental protection are not viewed as mutually exclusive community goals in the Springfield area.

Chattanooga's partnerships for downtown development and special events have successfully re-energized its center city. That same spirit of partnership and collaboration exists in Springfield in the form of the Urban Districts Alliance and the Springfield Finance and Development Corporation. We should recognize the opportunities we have to work together to revitalize Springfield's downtown with the development of Civic Park, the Expo Center, ice rinks, and continued improvements to other center city cultural and visitor attractions.

Seeing the Tennessee Aquarium, a model for Springfield's museum and aquarium project, offered us a glimpse into Springfield's future as a tourist destination. We gleaned some specific ideas from the Chattanooga visit that might benefit tourism in the Springfield area:

- The potential for an electric shuttle bus system connecting the American National Fish and Wildlife Living Museum and Aquarium with other sites in Springfield's center city should be explored.

- Chattanooga has far more resources available for tourism and visitor attraction marketing than Springfield currently does. Our community should research the potential for more pooled and cooperative marketing efforts between the Springfield CVB and specific visitor attractions in the area.
- Another lesson we should learn from Chattanooga has to do with regional cooperation. They market their area as a whole, with cooperation and collaboration among the individual visitor attractions in the area. Here, we should take a closer look at marketing the “Springfield-Branson area” as a single destination and encourage more partnership among the numerous attractions available in each community.

## Chattanooga Community Leadership Visit Participants July 23-25, 1998

Benjamin Alexander	City of Springfield
Jim Anderson	Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce
Pamela Anderson	James River Basin Partnership
Howard Bailey	Howard Bailey Company
Rob Baird	Concrete Company of Springfield
Jim Baker	Southwest Missouri State University
Brad Bodenhausen	Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce
Leigh Branson-Daniels	Springfield/Branson Regional Airport
Lance T. Brown	Urban Districts Alliance
Pam Buck	City of Springfield
Steve Burch	NationsBank
Geoff Butler	Butler, Rosenbury & Partners
Bob Chancellor	Springfield City Council
Sheila Collins	Stone Container
Bill Compere	Compere & Robinette, CPA's
Dave Coonrod	Greene County Commission
Andy Dalton	City Utilities
Gary Deaver	City Utilities Advisory Council
Gary Ellison	Friends of the Museum
Tom Finnie	City of Springfield
Lee Gannaway	Mayor, City of Springfield
Diane Gillespie	Convention & Visitors Bureau
Bud Greve	Springfield Public Schools
Conrad Griggs	Springfield City Council
Susan Hoechst	Priority Management
Jan Horton	Community Foundation of the Ozarks
Tracy Kimberlin	Convention & Visitors Bureau
Mary Lilly Smith	City of Springfield
Martin MacDonald	Bass Pro Shops
Mary Kay Meek	Meeks Building Centers
Lisa Nally	Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce
Richard Ollis	Ollis & Company
Lance Renner	Ozarks Technical Community College
Bill Reser	Springfield Board of Public Utilities
Russell Rhodes	Springfield City Council
John Rush	United Way of the Ozarks
Nikki Sells	Express Personnel Services
George Thompson	Thompson Sales
Bob Vanaman	Springfield City Council
Steve Vaught	Southwestern Bell Telephone
Shelia Wright	Springfield City Council