

Blount Partnership CEO Announces Retirement

Fred Forster, president and CEO of the Blount Partnership has announced plans to retire June 30, 2010. Forster has led the Blount Partnership, consisting of the Blount County Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Board, Smoky Mountain Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Chamber Foundation, for the past 11 years after a 35 year career in the U.S. Air Force and the TN Air National Guard. Forster retired as a Major General in 2003.

Under Forster's leadership a recent announcement was made by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recognizing the Blount Chamber as a 5-Star Accredited Chamber and Blount is one of only two in Tennessee. "As a relatively new member of the Blount County community, I am amazed at the number of areas Fred reached out to serve and make a difference," said Chamber Chair Doug Horn. "And for me to chair the Chamber this year and work more closely with Fred is an honor and one I will not forget," said Doug Horn.

During his tenure, the Smoky Mountain Convention & Visitors Bureau experienced an increase in tourism. During this past year, visitor expenditures in Blount County increased to \$300 million and the Townsend and Maryville Visitor Centers welcomed more than 160,000 visitors seeking area information.

"It has certainly been a pleasure to work with Fred the past several years," said Visitor's Bureau Chair Bryan Cable. "He has been a tremendous asset to this community and will be missed."

Forster has helped pave the path for the Chamber Foundation to eventually become a community foundation which is still in the works. "Fred has a passion for this community and it has shown in every aspect of his career. He is a team player and has been instrumental in making the Partnership not only successful, but establishing it as a benchmark for other Chambers in the State," said Sharon Hannum chair of the Chamber Foundation.

Forster has been instrumental in the soon-to-open Pellissippi Place research and technology park. Pellissippi Place is scheduled to be open this spring. "Fred has been nothing less than a wonderful colleague to work in so many different capacities across the community," said Matt Murray, chair of the Economic Development Board. "I cannot think of anyone with more integrity. He will be missed and I hope he sustains his engagement in the affairs of our community."

“It has been a wonderful 11 years working with so many positive people in this community,” said Forster. “There’s a wealth of dedication and talent in this community. This community works hard every day to ensure that Blount County remains the best place to live, work, and play. I appreciate the opportunity to serve in this capacity and congratulate our staff and many wonderful volunteers on a great job in all areas.”

A search committee will be formed and it is expected to have the position filled by July 1, 2010.