**BUSINESS HIGHLIGHTS**

Pittsburg State’s Center for Reading Becomes National Model

Pittsburg State University’s Center for Reading has become a national model, drawing the attention of state departments with high numbers of children with reading disabilities. Founded in 1996, by Dr. David Hurford, the Center for Reading helps students brought to it from states away to ‘decode’ what they’re reading. Hurford’s curriculum is used to help the nearly 40 percent of students across the country who read below the basic reading level. Currently the center is located in Whitesitt Hall but will be moved as a part of the Gorilla Rising project and will be located in downtown Pittsburg near Block22 by 2026.

Gorilla Connection – Pittsburg State University

Downtowns: The Heart and Soul of a Community

It is recognized that a city’s downtown is a critical component of a community as it represents the image of a city to the rest of the world. It is also a significant contributor to a city’s economic health. Businesses prefer the higher developed, walkable, and live-work-play communities as it retains workers and encourages collaboration.

Downtown areas are generally older and more resilient assets of a community, and their small but dense footprints create a critical mass of housing, retail and services. All of this helps foster a diverse community that is attached to where they live and invested in their community’s future.

When Pittsburg hosts downtown events, people across all walks of life are clearly seen enjoying the events together. It is also clear to see how downtown has been improved over the last decade as new businesses opened and projects such as Block22 have been complete.

There are many more projects to reshape downtown at various stages of development including, Pittsburg State University’s Gorilla Rising Project, the DVLP residential and commercial redevelopment, the renovation of Washington School, and many others.

Jay Byers – Deputy City Manager

Ascension Via Christi Receives ‘A’ Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade

For the first time since spring of 2021, Pittsburg’s Ascension Via Christi hospital received an ‘A’, the highest grade awarded by the Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade survey.

Like in school, Leapfrog grades hospitals on a scale of A,B,C,D and F, and have 32 metrics across five categories they score to grade a hospital. Each metric is scored and color coded to compare against hospital averages across the country.

Ascension Via Christi has enough data to be evaluated on 29 of the 32 available metrics and scored at or above average on 26 of the metrics. The worst score received was based on the number and variety of the staff.

Despite the staffing issues, Ascension Via Christi scored the best possible in nine categories. In four of them the hospital scored all of the possible points available for the metric and the other five categories has an average of 0 out of 1000 incidents for each of the metrics.

Over all this is a significant achievement for Ascension Via Christi as it is now one of 12 ‘A’ graded hospitals in Kansas which makes Pittsburg a safer place to live.

Pittsburg Observes Small Business Saturday

Pittsburg’s Small Business Saturday began at the Frisco Event Center, where shoppers picked up passports before heading out to the 33 participating locally-owned businesses offering special deals and discounts. Deals ranged from 15 percent off an entire purchase to free desserts.

After receiving 10 stamps on their passports, shoppers had the chance to enter for a prize bundle by returning their passport to the Frisco Event Center or emailing a picture of it in. The winners were drawn on the following Monday.

While at the Frisco Event Center, shoppers were able to get in some holiday shopping at the Pittsburg Art Council’s (PAC) Holiday Art Market, featuring over six individual vendors and businesses.

PAC President Crista Cunningham spoke of the creation of the now annual Holiday Art Market. It was created to give local artists a space to showcase their work as many artists work from home and do not have a brick-and-mortar store to sell from. It was also created to help show off the amazing talent found in Pittsburg.

Aaron Pyle – The Morning Sun

Heritage Tractor Breaks Ground on Facility Expansion Project

Heritage Tractor, a local John Deere dealership, officially broke ground on a new service facility on October 5th. Many of expressed excitement over the start of the project and what it will mean for the business and Pittsburg.

The facility was acquired in 2018, and the expansion will feature a facility with heat and air conditioning, a wash bay, and 38,500 square feet of additional service space. Director of Sales Jeremy Knuth says it is a big project for them but they’re looking forward to it. Additionally, they will add several technicians to the team to better take care of customers.

Heritage Tractor is a full-service John Deere dealership that provides agricultural and outdoor equipment as well as OEM parts and certified service. The dealership began with just one location in Baldwin City in 1998.

Now, the dealership has 570 employees across 21 locations in several states including Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas.

Aaron Pyle – The Morning Sun

Going Solar

When Phil Minton, the owner of Jock’s Nitch, thinks about the business’ utility bills over the last 22 years, he shudders. Thanks to a federal grant, the bills over the next 22 years should be much more palatable.

Jock’s Nitch was one of 34 Kansas businesses that have been chosen to receive US Department of Agriculture Rural Development grants to help rural small business owners make renewable energy improvements. Altogether, the grants in Kansas total more than $4.2 million.

Jock’s Nitch will receive $50,000 to help purchase and install a solar photovoltaic system, which is expected to replace 97 percent of the company’s electric usage a year, or the equivalent energy to power six homes. The project, which includes the installation of 120 solar panels, is expected to save the company $9,619 each year.

Minton said the Building’s location, made solar feasible and likes the payout projections. The soon-to-be-installed solar array follows the replacement of the building’s roof, and sends the message Jock’s Nitch isn’t going anywhere.

The Jock’s Nitch Pittsburg location is the heart of the business. Most customers only see the retail on the first floor, but the upper two floors accommodate offices, production, as well as shipping and receiving activities.

Ron Womble – The Morning Sun