



Business is truly global

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by Ronnie Bryant, Special to The Post

Greetings from Rio – a city in one of the strongest emerging economies in the world. About a year and a half ago, US Airways helped the Charlotte region more easily develop relationships with Brazilian companies when it began nonstop service to Rio de Janeiro. Last November, the Charlotte Regional Partnership hosted Brazilian dignitaries and a business delegation. Then in March of this year, a group from the Charlotte region and the N.C. Department of Commerce made our first trip together to meet with companies in Rio and São Paulo. There is no doubt that Brazil holds opportunities for our region.

So, this week we're back. **Barry Matherly** from the Lincoln Economic Development Association, **Mike Smith** from the Greater Statesville Development Corporation, **Uconda Dunn** of the N.C. Department of Commerce; **Panico Peres** of Sabo USA and I will be visiting – or revisiting – about a dozen executives in Rio and São Paulo to explore how their companies would succeed in Charlotte USA. In addition to individual companies, we also will meet with members of both Sindipecas (Automobile Manufacturers Association) and AmCham (American Chamber of Commerce).

Currently, there are six Brazilian-owned companies in our region that employ more than 1,000 people. This year, Providencia USA announced that it will join this group. When it opens a manufacturing plant in Statesville next year, it will have invested about \$80 million.

Foreign direct investment is becoming increasingly important to our region. In fact, it's so important that we are planning to generate one-fourth of our new projects this FY from international companies. In October, the Partnership's **David Swenson** led a group of partners from Cabarrus, Lincoln and York counties; Parker Poe; UNC Charlotte and Central Piedmont Community College to France and Germany, where they connected with existing clients and developed new relationships with company decision makers. Our contingent presented the Charlotte region's advantages to a delegation of educators and business leaders. Additionally, they marketed Charlotte USA at an electric vehicle mobility trade show in Munich and at Europe's largest plastic industry trade show in Dusseldorf. Over two weeks, the Partnership team visited with 30 businesses involved in the plastics, aerospace, transportation equipment, biosciences and energy sectors.

More than 850 international companies are located in our region, and that number continues to grow. You might have noticed that many of the recent expansion and location announcements have been for foreign-owned companies. Of course, we have a few aces up our sleeve: our international allies in the Charlotte region. There are 18 honorary consuls, a dozen international business organizations and 13 foreign cultural groups in Charlotte USA. Not only are these men and women invaluable in our marketing and business recruitment efforts, they help newcomers from other countries acclimate and feel a sense of community.

The bottom line is that our region continues to have strong international business development opportunities, especially within our target sectors. Although there remains strong global competition for new investments and jobs, our accessible international airport, diversified cluster of foreign-owned businesses and overall competitive business climate offer companies an optimal setting to locate and expand in the United States.

Keeping in touch

I hosted our December investor lunch last week, welcoming **Harvey Gantt** from Gantt Huberman Architects, **Steve Garfinkel** from Garfinkel Immigration Law Firm, **Stephen Gosselin** of ECS Carolinas, **Ed Hawes** from Region's Bank, **Charles Knox** from The Knox Group and **Keith Pehl** of Optima Engineering to our office. The monthly gatherings are a way for us to further engage our

stakeholders, to give them an opportunity to get to know us better, and for me to learn how they think we're doing and what's on their minds.

In addition to the small luncheons, we connect with our investors through three educational investor forums on timely industry topics; annual gatherings in Charlotte and Columbia to meet with our regional legislators; our annual awards luncheon; and our holiday drop in.

So, take advantage of these ways to engage with us – and I hope to see you Dec. 16 at this year's holiday celebration.

Racing to PRI 2010

David Swenson and representatives from Cabarrus, Lincoln and Rowan counties, as well as from Charlotte and Mooresville will head back to Orlando this week to market the region at the 2010 [Performance Racing Industry](#) trade show. The Charlotte region is home to more than 400 racing businesses, and this show provides an unequalled opportunity for us to market that cluster to the rest of the racing world. Exhibitors and attendees should be familiar with what Charlotte USA has to offer, since North Carolina was featured in [PRI Magazine's](#) November show edition.

Taking to the skies: Dynamic women of Charlotte USA

Women in the Charlotte region definitely have a high profile and it got higher, so to speak, this month with 21 outstanding regional women being featured in US Airways Magazine.

Last Thursday, Gov. **Bev Perdue** was in town to help US Airways and Pace Communications CEO and owner Ambassador **Bonnie McElveen-Hunter** launch the issue and personally congratulate the Charlotte USA 20. Members of the 16-county Charlotte region nominated nearly 100 women who have shaped our region. A regional committee representing a broad cross-section of disciplines chose the 21 women (there was a tie) who are clearly leaders in her field; have made a recognizable impact toward improving the lives of others in the greater Charlotte region; and have fostered growth and advancement in her community.

The special 24-page section in the December US Airways Magazine will reach 5.6 million passengers. If you won't be taking to the air this month, you can see the profiles of Charlotte USA's dynamic women [here](#).

Getting back on track

Patriot Rail, which bought Piedmont & Northern, formally entered into a 20-year plan with the N.C. Department of Transportation last week to run, maintain and market freight service on the 13-mile line between Mount Holly and Gastonia. Patriot Rail intends to open at least part of the long-dormant track to freight traffic next year.

Strolling along

A \$58,000 Advantage Carolina grant will help create another section of The Carolina Thread Trail. The 2.3-mile trail in Harrisburg along the Rocky River will be designed for walking, running and biking. So far, 67 miles of the Thread Trail have opened, including trails in Concord and Kannapolis. Eight of the counties have planned a total of 876 miles of trails and have fully adopted master plans. Eventually the trails will connect, creating a 15-county, two-state regional conservation network of trails and rivers.

Locations, expansions, contractions

Things really are picking up towards the end of the year, and I don't anticipate it slowing down. Last week, Shaw Power Group announced that it plans to hire 225 people in Charlotte to work on nuclear power plants that Toshiba America Nuclear Energy is building in Texas. Shaw will begin hiring immediately.

Meanwhile, Toshiba will add 25 to 40 jobs at its Charlotte location over the next few months in connection with the Texas project. The Japanese company also indicated that more new positions will be coming.

In Mooresville, NGK Ceramics said that it will invest \$43 million to expand its plant and add 60 jobs.

The company, which makes ceramic honeycomb for catalytic converters in cars, already employs about 430 full-time workers in Iredell County. This is NGK's 12th expansion since it opened in Mooresville 22 years ago. The company expects to complete its latest expansion by this time next year. Richard Petty Motorsports changed hands last week. However, before it did so, the company cut 75 jobs. The NASCAR hall of fame is part of the investment group that now owns his namesake company. Other members are Medallion Financial Corp. and DGB Investments.

Unfortunately, it wasn't all good news last week. Federal Express will be closing a Charlotte trucking operation, one of about 100 facilities that will shutter across the U.S. as part of the company's plan to consolidate its short- and long-haul freight networks. The closure will put about 172 people out of work.

SINGLE Temperature Controls Inc. has opened its North American sales, engineering and warehouse facility in Charlotte. The German-headquartered company selected the Queen City for the large number of German companies in the region and for the city's location in relation to its customers in the electronics, automotive and aerospace industries. The local operation also will include a testing and repair facility.

Residential mortgage lender Foundation Financial Group will add 30 employees to the 50 it already planned to hire by the end of the year at its Charlotte mortgage-sales center. The additional people will be hired by the end of March.

Kudos

Congratulations to **James Mitchell Jr.** who was named president of the National League of Cities over the weekend. James, who had served at the league's first vice president, chairs the Charlotte City Council's Economic Development Committee and is the city's representative on our Board of Directors. He also is vice chair of the City Council's Housing and Neighborhood Development Committee and is a member of the Restructuring Government Committee.

Welcome

Today is **Jim Prosser's** first day on the job as executive director of the Centralina Council of Governments. Jim was the former city manager of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and more recently had his own consulting firm.

RONNIE BRYANT is president and CEO of Charlotte Regional Partnership.

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