

# Alabama pushes for VW plant

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Alabama officials have not backed off an aggressive campaign to bring a Volkswagen assembly plant to the state, the state's top industry recruiter says.

"We absolutely are still interested," said Neal Wade, director of the Alabama Development Office. "We are aggressively going after this project and will continue to do so."

Wade reacted to a Press-Register report in Mobile that quoted unnamed state officials "familiar with the project" as saying that Alabama may step back from the \$1 billion project because of concerns that VW may have made an agreement with the United Auto Workers union.

Wade told The Huntsville Times for a story Saturday that he had heard nothing about talks between the German automaker and the UAW until he was contacted by a reporter earlier this week.

Gov. Bob Riley's chief spokesman, Jeff Emerson, confirmed

Friday that Alabama was continuing to "very aggressively pursue" the VW project.

VW is expected to announce a decision in July between sites in Limestone County and Chattanooga. Neither VW nor UAW officials could be reached by the Huntsville newspaper for comment.

Rep. Mike Hubbard, R-Auburn, chairman of the Alabama Republican Party, said he was in a meeting in Huntsville when Riley and state officials met with VW representatives.

Hubbard said he never got the sense that the union issue could thwart a deal in Alabama.

Brian Hilson, president and CEO of the Huntsville-Madison County Chamber of Commerce, and Tom Hill, economic development director for Limestone County, both declined comment.

Representatives from Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom and House Speaker Seth Hammett's offices said they have been told to expect a special legislative session in

mid-July to work on an incentives package for VW.

Legislators from northern Alabama noted that the UAW already has a presence in the area — at the Delphi plant in Limestone County and the Continental Corp. in Huntsville.

While he hasn't been directly involved in any of the negotiations, state Sen. Parker Griffith, D-Huntsville, said he's been told that the union issue "is not a deal-breaker" for building the plant in Limestone County.

"I'm hearing all good things," he said. "I'm hearing we could have an announcement in the next several weeks and that a special session is going to revolve around the Volkswagen announcement."

Rep. Micky Hammon, R-Decatur, said the UAW has been a strong union in the region for several years.

Because Delphi is scheduled to close in 2009, Hammon suggested there would be a ready-made work force for VW. The company plans to employ about 2,000 workers.

# On the second stage of a 3-day race



STAFF PHOTO BY MEGHAN BROWN

Clay Warner rounds a corner on a Raccoon Mountain trail Saturday as he nears the end of the second of three stages in the Chattanooga Mountains Stage Race. The 18-mile run was preceded Friday by a 22-mile run on Lookout Mountain and will conclude today with a 20-mile course on Signal Mountain. The event is part of the Rock/Creek Trail Series and benefits The Boonies, a local trail running organization.

# Questions raised on court contract

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MEMPHIS — A psychologist accused in an unrelated indictment of lying to the FBI won a lucrative contract with the Memphis drug court largely because of a judge's recommendation, a newspaper reports.

Psychologist Roger Morgan got the \$150,000 contract in 2003 to work with drunken driving offenders. Overall, he has drawn \$450,000 for work with the Memphis court, The Commercial Appeal newspaper said.

Morgan was charged in May with lying to the FBI about offering an undisclosed amount of

money to former state Sen. John Ford while lobbying for a prescription drug law benefiting psychologists.

Ford, who resigned from the Senate under indictment in 2005, is serving an unrelated 5 1/2-year prison sentence for bribery and is awaiting federal trial in Nashville on charges of failing to report payments from state contractors.

Morgan got help from Ford in 1998 in getting licensed as a psychologist in Tennessee.

Two earlier license applications were rejected because of questions about Morgan's academic

qualifications, the newspaper reported.

Morgan, 55, did not respond to the newspaper's interview request. Calls by The Associated Press to his office and home were unanswered. He has pleaded not guilty to the perjury charges.

After working as a volunteer psychologist for Judge Tim Dwyer, Morgan was one of six applicants for the drug court contract.

A memo obtained by The Commercial Appeal showed that Morgan got the job despite apparent weaknesses in his application.

# Griscom to head state press association

STAFF REPORT

Tom Griscom, publisher and executive editor of the Chattanooga Times Free Press, was elected president of the Tennessee Press Association at the organization's summer convention in Johnson City.

"TPA is the voice for journalists across the state and a long-time advocate of open government at all levels," Mr. Griscom said. "I appreciate the opportunity to lead the TPA this year



Tom Griscom

and to serve as host to the summer convention next summer."

During the next year, he said TPA members will focus on reconnecting with readers in Tennessee and the ways they access information through print and

online mediums.

Mr. Griscom, who served as vice president for daily newspapers last year, succeeded Pauline Sherrer, publisher of the Crossville Chronicle, as TPA president.

The TPA, a trade association of the state's daily and non-daily newspapers, has 128 members. Founded in 1870-71, its mission is to create a unified voice for the newspaper industry of Tennessee, according to its Web site.

# Lanier offers Wendy's gift cards to officials

Chris Lanier, former head of the local Citizen's Taxpayers Organization, went the extra mile Monday in encouraging local public officials to eat fast food rather than expensive steak dinners.

At the Hamilton County Pachyderm Club's meeting, Mr. Lanier pulled several Wendy's gift cards out of his pocket and offered them to any official who wanted one. The audience laughed.

The Chattanooga Times Free Press last Sunday quoted Mr. Lanier as asking, "Why is it necessary to go to a steakhouse as opposed to Wendy's?" in a story about county officials' use of government-issued purchasing cards.

The Pachyderm Club meets at Niko's Southside Grill at the corner of 14th and Cowart streets. The buffet lunch for the Republican club's members costs \$13 per person.

## SHULER GETS WARM RECEPTION IN UT COUNTRY

Former University of Tennessee football standout and current U.S. Rep. Heath Shuler, D-N.C., got a rousing reception from those attending the Marilyn Lloyd Dinner on Monday night.

During the Hamilton County Democratic Party fundraiser, Rep. Shuler was introduced by Jim Hall, of Signal Mountain, as "your All-American in Congress."

"Now I know why we won so many football games over at UT," the congressman said after the hearty applause.

In 2006, Rep. Shuler was elected to represent the mountainous 11th Congressional District of North Carolina, which includes Asheville, N.C. He is up for re-election to another two-year term this fall.

The congressman drew a connection between East Tennessee and Western North Carolina during his brief remarks to the Democratic crowd.

"We're mountain folks. We believe in that shared heritage," he said. "We both share those values across the mountains. ... I think our core values remain constant."

The Marilyn Lloyd Dinner, held for the first time this year, is a fundraiser honoring the former congresswoman from the 3rd Congressional District. She served from 1975 to 1995.

## GORDON, BERKE LOOK BACK

State Sen. Andy Berke, D-Chattanooga, got to sit next to his old boss, U.S. Rep. Bart Gordon, D-Tenn., during the Marilyn Lloyd Dinner.

Sen. Berke introduced the

congressman, is chairman of the House Committee on Science and Technology, for whom he worked as a legislative aide after finishing college.

"I moved to Washington, D.C., to work for a guy who was the same age then that I am now, and, man, did I think he was old," Sen. Berke, 40, joked.

Rep. Gordon, who has represented a Middle Tennessee

district since 1985, praised the freshman state senator.

"I was smart enough 18 years ago to recognize that Andy Berke wasn't just a bright fellow, but he was a totally decent fellow," Rep. Gordon said. "It just tickles me to death to see him now serving in the Senate."

## DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION OR BUST

A pair of area delegates for U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., at this year's Democratic National Convention have asked for some help to get to Denver in August.

Justin Wilkins and Elizabeth Crews held a fundraiser Saturday at the Joseph H. Warner House on Vine Street to underwrite their travel expenses.

Though the invitation to the fundraiser noted that contributions of any amount were appreciated, certain contribution levels carried sponsorship titles. For contributions of \$25, one could be a "supporter," contributors of \$50 were tagged "delegates," and for more than \$100, one could be called a "superdelegate."

The two delegates also are accepting contributions online and by mail.

## GOVERNOR HELD UP BY SPONTANEOUS WEDDING

Last week Gov. Phil Bredesen had to apologize for being a half-hour late to a ceremonial bill-signing event in Chattanooga, but he said he had "a pretty good excuse."

The governor had just come from a similar event in Knoxville, in which he signed the Long-Term Care Community Choices Act of 2008. Shortly before the signing, he'd received a call from state Sen. Tim Burchett, R-Knoxville.

The senator and his fiancée, Allison Beaver, originally set a wedding date of Sept. 6 but on a whim the couple decided to have the governor marry them instead, the governor recounted.

Gov. Bredesen married the couple under a tree after the Knoxville bill signing, he said.

"I figured you all would understand," he said to the crowd of media and long-term care advocates, providers and patients gathered at the Alexian Brothers Community Services PACE program building in Chattanooga. "Since we're in the mode here, if there's anybody out here who's kind of holding hands and would like, after this is over, to have yourself hitched up ... I'll be glad to take care of you."

## NOT THE WILDLIFE THEY WERE EXPECTING

Members of the local media and Tennessee Aquarium officials got an unexpected eyeful as they watched for wildlife while aboard the aquarium's new 65-foot boat, the River Gorge Explorer, during the vessel's maiden voyage Thursday.

While motoring through the Tennessee River Gorge, a bikini-clad woman on a nearby pontoon boat twice flashed the journalists, aquarium officials and community sponsors of the \$2.9 million Explorer.

"Girls Gone Wild, Tennessee River Gorge edition," commented Gary Poole, news editor for the Web site Scenic City Online, shortly after the flashing.

Mr. Poole and representatives from numerous other local media outlets were aboard the vessel as part of an event organized by the Tennessee Aquarium to promote the aquarium's latest attraction.

Tennessee Aquarium spokesman Thom Benson said after the boat docked that he didn't witness the River Gorge Flasher but speculated that the sighting might be an added draw for those considering a trip through Tennessee's "Grand Canyon."

## THE \$14 BILLION QUESTION

Opponents of a proposed nuclear power plant in Northeast Alabama are updating the 1950s television show "The \$64,000 Question" with a costlier challenge for local residents.

The Bellefonte Efficiency and Sustainability Team and other environmental groups are sponsoring a contest about what could be done with \$14 billion. The anti-nuclear activists claim building new reactors at the Bellefonte site in Hollywood, Ala., will cost TVA \$14 billion, although earlier estimates from TVA were only half that much.

Louise Gorenflo, a coordinator for BEST, said the contest is designed to get people thinking about how much energy could be saved in the Tennessee Valley.

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