

The Leonard G. Herring Family Foundation, NC Tech Paths purchase “Block 46”

Two local non-profit organizations will facilitate development of vacant furniture plant site as modern “live-work-play” district on the Reddies River

North Wilkesboro, N.C. (May 4, 2022) – Lee Herring, President of the Leonard G. Herring Family Foundation, and Craig DeLucia, President of NC TechPaths, Inc. and CEO of Herring’s organization, announced that their two nonprofits have purchased the remaining undeveloped land on the former American Drew Furniture site in North Wilkesboro. Known locally as “Block 46,” the land consists of over 14 acres adjacent the Reddies River and has been vacant since the site was demolished in 2011.

“We need a place for NC Tech Paths to build a modern workspace for 200 to 300 technology employees of high-growth companies over the next five years,” said Herring. “Our community also needs more housing, as its absence is the primary barrier for our economic growth. Our intent for the site is to address these two needs. As well, our initial planning for the land includes recreational use of the Reddies River which adjoins the site.” Herring further noted that “Childcare and a greater focus on individual health and wellness, as well as other amenities to support the good-paying jobs generated through NC Tech Paths, are also needs we will explore for this property.”

NC Tech Paths will construct a 30,000 to 40,000 square foot Regional Tech Outpost, or RTO, on a piece of Block 46. In addition to hybrid workspace, plans for the new building also include a “maker space” as a place for children and adults in the community to experience collaboration, learning and sharing in the fields of science, technology, education and math. “Our long-term goal is for Wilkes County to have a regional STEM Center that serves all of Western North Carolina, so that children and families no longer have to drive to Durham, Greensboro or Charlotte,” said DeLucia. “The Maker Space will be our first step in providing hands-on STEM experiences to our neighbors.”

The planned construction comes on the heels of NC Tech Paths acquiring the Wilkes Journal-Patriot building in April to serve as the first RTO. DeLucia stressed that the new construction on Block 46 will be “in addition to the J-P and not instead of it” based on demand for collaborative workspace for NC Tech Paths employer-partners as well as interest in co-working space among entrepreneurs and teleworkers.

The Herring Family Foundation will donate approximately five acres of land in the Reddies River floodway and floodplain to Wilkes County for the construction of a new riverfront park. The Foundation will re-sell the remaining land to developers as part of a master site plan for a “River District” that ultimately connects the Towns of Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro. The Foundation will grant any profits from the re-sale of the land to NC Tech Paths to fund construction costs of the RTO. “We hope that the site concept for Block 46 will be the first step in creating a true live-work-play corridor along the Reddies River, and we couldn’t be happier for NC Tech Paths to anchor the ‘work’ part of the project,” said DeLucia.

The acquisition of Block 46 comes less than a month after the public unveiling of The Great State of Wilkes Outdoor Action plan. The Outdoor Action Plan is led by the Outdoor Economy Workgroup, which includes representatives from the Health Foundation, Towns of Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro, Wilkes Economic Development Corporation, Wilkesboro Tourism Development Authority, Wilkes Health Department, Yadkin River Greenway Council and the County of Wilkes. The purpose of the Outdoor Action Plan is to create a community-led vision and 15-year roadmap to ensure strategic decision-making to grow the outdoor economy and encourage active living. “The Outdoor Action Plan aligns well with our plans for Block 46,” said Herring. “When the Outdoor Economy Workgroup announced their vision to the public, we saw an opportunity to be a catalyst for the overall River District.”

The Town of North Wilkesboro and the County of Wilkes have submitted grant requests to the North Carolina Rural Transformation Grant Program for the design and construction of the park, and for the infrastructure, roads, and streetscapes required to prepare Block 46 for development. The Town and County have committed matching grant funds to the projects. Grant applications and design work were provided by Eric Woolridge of Destination by Design, a planning and engineering firm in Boone that specializes in rural redevelopment projects.

“This is a rare and wonderful opportunity for the Town of North Wilkesboro, and everyone in the Wilkes County area,” said North Wilkesboro Mayor Marc Hauser. “The timing couldn't be better with the grant money available, NC Tech Paths' needs for office and housing, and the Herring Family Foundation's generosity. This is a very exciting time with great possibilities!”

“We're at the outset of a rural revival in Wilkes County,” said DeLucia. “Companies are looking to relocate here because of our beautiful surroundings and quality of life. Employers are hiring technology talent to live in our community because of our best-in-state education programs and broadband internet. And more of our young people are seeing a path to living here and raising a family here, based on the opportunities that are being created. We're even being approached by students at Appalachian State University who grew up in other neighboring counties but want to live in Wilkes after graduation.”

Herring agreed, noting that “The time to invest in our community is now. We see the reversal of so many economic trends – from the globalization of manufacturing to the uneven distribution of technology jobs in urban areas. Today, talent is leaving the cities and moving to the places with the best quality of life and seeking out employers that are willing to let their teams work from anywhere. That includes Wilkes County – and it's underway. Investments that we make today will last a generation or more.”

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About The Leonard G. Herring Family Foundation

The Herring Family Foundation (HFF), based in Wilkes County, honors the civic and philanthropic spirit of Leonard and Rose Herring and their family. Leonard retired from Lowe's Companies in 1996 after over 40 years of service. As a member of the Office of the President from 1960 to 1978 and then as President and CEO from 1978 to 1996, Leonard oversaw the growth of Lowe's from a privately-owned 15-store company with \$30 million of annual sales to a public company with more than 365 stores and annual sales of more than \$7 billion. On behalf of the Herring Family, HFF seeks to fund resources that are broadly accessible to members of our communities, and that enable individuals to learn, grow, and provide richer and healthier lives for themselves and their families.

About NC Tech Paths

NC Tech Paths is a non-profit corporation dedicated to establishing Northwest North Carolina as a national leader in fostering rural inclusion in the digital economy through a variety of workforce development, employer partnerships, and entrepreneurial support interventions, all of which allow our neighbors to live, train, and remain in the area. Based in Wilkes County, NC Tech Paths focuses on the citizens of Wilkes, Ashe and Alleghany Counties but offers its services more broadly to a labor shed of over 500,000 individuals.

DOWNTOWN NORTH WILKESBORO

PROJECT AREAS

- BLOCK 46
- REDDIES RIVER PARK

5.75 ACRES

**PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT ENVELOPE
(BREWERY, DAY CARE, AND/OR HOUSING)**

+/- 5 ACRES

INDEPENDENCE AVE

MAIN STREET

WILKESBORO AVE

REDDIES RIVER



COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION GRANT PROJECT AREAS
RIVER DISTRICT PHASE 1 IMPLEMENTATION

