

# "THEY CARE IN GREENVILLE":

WORKFORCE, BUSINESS CLIMATE, PASSION PROPEL GROWTH



Partnered Content



By John C. Stevenson

Talk to local business leaders and you'll hear similar stories about why they located in Greenville. The area's amenities, mild climate and reasonable cost of living frequently boost the city and the region into national top-10 lists.

But that's only scratching the surface.

Delve deeper than the headline talking points and business leaders will point to a spirit of cooperation between agencies like the Greenville Area Development Corp., the local chambers of commerce, and state and local government, as well as a diverse labor pool supported by state technical schools, as driving forces that have the Upstate region poised for continued growth.

Houston native Jon-Michial Carter discovered Greenville when he and his partners were looking to join an incubator program as a way to win investors for their planned business. They would go on to found ChartSpan, a health care industry software company that offers solutions to help patients access their medical records and to improve communications with, and access to, health care providers.

Greenville was not Carter's first choice as a home for the startup.



**JEFF UPHUES**

CEO, DC BLOX  
Photo courtesy of DC BLOX



**JOHN HAMMES**

General Manager of the Americas, Softbox Systems  
Photo by Amy Randall Photography

“The other accelerator programs made us feel like we were lucky to have been chosen,” Carter said in a recent telephone interview. “The accelerator program in Greenville made us feel like they were lucky. It meant a lot to us.”

And that attitude was only one thing that piqued Carter’s interest: “We had zero intention of moving to Greenville or staying in Greenville, but ... once I got to Greenville, several things happened. One, we fell in love with the city. We could not believe what was happening – there was this renaissance of this old textile city which was now this thriving place for startups to attract talent to grow their teams, to raise capital.”

At the end of the accelerator program, Carter received an email from the GADC that would change the future course of ChartSpan.

The email was not just from GADC, but also from the county perspective, plus city leaders and administrators. So I went to GADC and met with (GADC project manager) Tony Smith, and he said ‘Hey we watched your pitch. Several county and city leaders were in the audience, and we think you’re going to be a big deal. But we also heard you say you were going back to Texas, and we want you to stay here,’ which was fascinating to me, because at the time we were just two guys in a garage, but we thought we were going to be big and they thought we were going to be big.”

It wasn’t just the GADC pitch, however. Carter said the nascent ChartSpan management team was impressed by the agency’s continued support.

“GADC went out of their way to plug us into the entrepreneurship ecosystem – with NEXT, with developers, with the Department of Commerce – and we thought that was amazing. We knew if we went back to Houston, no one was going to give a damn who ChartSpan was, but they cared in Greenville, and they went out of their way to make sure we stayed.”

#### A “Unique” Blend of Support

Far from a startup, Ernst & Young is a multinational professional services network that has had a presence in the Upstate for more than 90 years. But in the late 2010s, as EY crafted its strategic plan, the company also found reasons to continue its presence and investment in the Upstate, according to Marshall Franklin, Greenville-based EY global client service executive and a past GADC chair.

“It really was the community and business-growth opportunities that we saw here that compelled us to stay and to make further investments,” Franklin explained. “The people of the Upstate are really grounded, business is cooperative and the government is supportive. And I think the Upstate is

unique in that blend. We just have awesome people, and it’s a cooperative business environment that I think is unique in not only working to succeed in our own areas of focus, but being willing to help others succeed as well.”

Franklin also noted the stream of young talent constantly joining the Upstate workforce.

“The other piece is the talented graduates coming out of Clemson University, out of Greenville Technical College, Furman provide a ready labor pool,” he said. “Overall we’re an exporter of the graduate talent from those schools, so it’s really easy to simply retain more of them to fill the job opportunities,” something Franklin said is especially important for startups.

Jeff Uphues, CEO of DC BLOX, a multi-tenant data center which is working in the Upstate to complete what will be the first Tier 3 data center in South Carolina, also noted the value of the region’s labor pool to companies considering expanding into the Southeast.

“What you really see is you see this is a young, vibrant town,” Uphues said of Greenville. “You can tell the work that’s being done to keep the kids that go to South Carolina, to keep the kids that go to Furman, to keep the kids that go to Clemson, to keep the kids that go to Bob Jones or other universities ... you’re doing a good job of keeping them in Greenville, of keeping them in the Upstate. You do a good job of keeping younger talent instead of losing it, so when you come into (Greenville), you see a young, vibrant workforce that is engaged, and you see so many companies that are coming in here to look at that talent pool and say ‘how can I build around that?’”

#### Spirit of Cooperation is Alive and Well

New Jersey-based Sudler Companies is the developer behind Fountain Inn’s Fox Hill Business Park, Greenville County’s first new Class A business park in two decades. Brian Sudler, the company’s principal, lauded the Palmetto State as a “wonderful place to do business.”

“We’re expanding our locations to the Southeast,” Sudler said. “The Upstate – Greenville County, South Carolina – is a place that was very appealing to us by way of large population, economic growth, and being that it’s diverse in the industrial sector, since it is not only distribution warehouses but manufacturing and light manufacturing.”

That’s not all Sudler said is appealing about the Upstate: “It’s the quality of life, it’s a right-to-work state, it’s a pro-business state and county. It’s a wonderful place to do business. The people want to do whatever they can to help you and assist as long as it involves beneficial economic growth for the county.”



**Tony Smith**  
Project Manager, GADC



**Marshall Franklin**  
Global Client Service Executive, EY / Past GADC chair

Those benefits continue to draw attention to the Upstate, and the GADC has targeted several types of industries to lure to the area, including advanced materials, aerospace, automotive, biosciences, data centers, and offices. One big win for the Upstate came with the announcement that United Community Bank would move its headquarters from Blairsville, Georgia, to Greenville. The target date to complete the move is July 1, according to Lynn Harton, UCB chairman and CEO.

As with ChartSpan, Harton said the GADC went to extraordinary lengths to win the headquarters for Greenville, which was pitted against other cities, including Atlanta and Charlotte.

“First, I guess it’s the cooperation between the business community and other local leaders – community leaders, political leaders, etc. – is as good as any place I’ve ever seen,” he said. The GADC “was really kind of our support and our advocate in the process because headquarters are competitive things. And we wanted Greenville to be the answer, but it certainly helped when the GADC helped us work with the county, the tax incentives and job incentives, and helped us work with the state on that as well. They made us feel like – and made the board feel like, more importantly – that South Carolina really wanted us here.

“Everything at the end of the day, you know people say ‘it’s not personal; it’s business.’ Well, everything is personal,” he added. “And we felt like we were treated personally. That was really the difference they played in the process.”

Another headquarters that has opened in Greenville is Softbox Systems, a U.K.-based



**Fountain Inn's Fox Hill Business Park**  
Rendering by McMillan Pazdan Smith Architecture

designer of temperature-controlled packaging solutions that located its American HQ here in 2013. One reason Softbox management liked the Upstate was because of the region’s infrastructure.

“The Upstate offers an ideal business climate, a skilled workforce, an attractive quality of life, and a team of various organizations that work to acquire and keep businesses,” said John Hammes, general manager of the Americas for Softbox Systems. “Additionally, its superior business climate and proximity to essential transportation hubs, including the I-85 corridor and the nearby major U.S. ports and waterways, can assist established businesses and startups.

“Plus,” he added, “Clemson University is and continues to be of great interest to startups, which also benefit from governmental support and other businesses willing to assist, drive and connect in the area.”

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#### International Flavor, Openness to New Ideas

Looking forward, UCB’s Harton said he expects Greenville will continue to attract a variety of businesses and industries to the Upstate and, by extension, the Palmetto State.

“One of the things I like about Greenville is that it’s open in a lot of ways,” he said. “It’s open to new ideas. It’s open to different cultures. My wife was born and raised in Brazil and we’ve lived all over the Southeast, and there have been places where she didn’t feel particularly like she fit in. Here, the community just really welcomed her.”

That openness is something that other business leaders will find valuable as they scout locations for future growth.

“It’s hard to say where (Greenville ends) up,” Harton said. “In conjunction with Clemson, is it research on advanced materials? Is it new medical-technology research? Who knows? But if you look at the past, Greenville has proven its ability to adapt and welcome different people and different ideas, and I think that’s what will continue to drive the success of the area.”



### Recent Significant GADC Announcements



**Michelin North America** – Has made numerous facility additions and expansions including a \$100 million expansion in 2020



**DC BLOX** – Recently broke ground on a 54,000-square-foot Tier III regional data center with investment by DC BLOX and tenant customers totaling over \$200 million



**Bosch Rexroth** – Has grown from one plant to three, including engineering and research and development, adding hundreds of jobs and investing millions of dollars



**ChartSpan** – This Texas startup set up its headquarters in Greenville and has grown from two employees to more than 350 health IT employees



**Softbox Systems** – globally known manufacturer of sophisticated temperature-controlled packaging set up its North American headquarters here and employs more than 70



**United Community Bank** – Headquarters relocation from Georgia to Greenville will soon be completed; the move brings with it 227 jobs. With \$18.6 billion in assets, UCB is now the largest bank HQ in South Carolina



**Fox Hill Business Park** – Located in Fountain Inn, this is Greenville County’s first major Class A business and industrial park in 20 years. The business park comprises 172 acres with 2.5 million square feet of industrial and distribution space



**Lockheed Martin Aerospace** – Earned a highly competitive \$900 million contract to provide F-16 sustainment support, positioning Greenville as an F-16 Center of Excellence



**Fitesa Fiberweb** – World leader and innovator in the design and manufacturing of nonwoven fabric solutions with hundreds of millions of dollars invested in modernizations and expansion