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Finalist for CEO of Myrtle Beach Regional Economic Development Corporation revealed

by [Courtney Griffin](#)

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The finalist who could be hired as the new head of the Myrtle Beach Regional Economic Development Corporation was revealed at the Horry County Council budget retreat Friday.

Fred Richardson, chairman of the MBREDC, announced Jim Moore as the top finalist for CEO.

Moore is currently the director of business development for the North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESA) out of Florence.

NESA is a regional economic development organization that serves a nine-county region in the northeast corner of South Carolina.

Richardson said Moore has more than 20 years of economic development experience.

In addition to his work in Florence, he also served as the CEO of an Economic Development Corporation in Kentucky.

Moore said if hired he wants to make Horry County not just a tourist destination but a business destination.

"It means a lot, like I said, it's a very very exciting opportunity," Moore said.

Moore said he already has some industries in mind to try to bring to the area, but he's keeping that a secret until he gets the final offer from the executive committee.

A formal offer is expected to be announced in a little over a week, according to Horry County Council Chairman Mark Lazarus.

Myrtle Beach metro area sees one of nation's highest rates of job growth

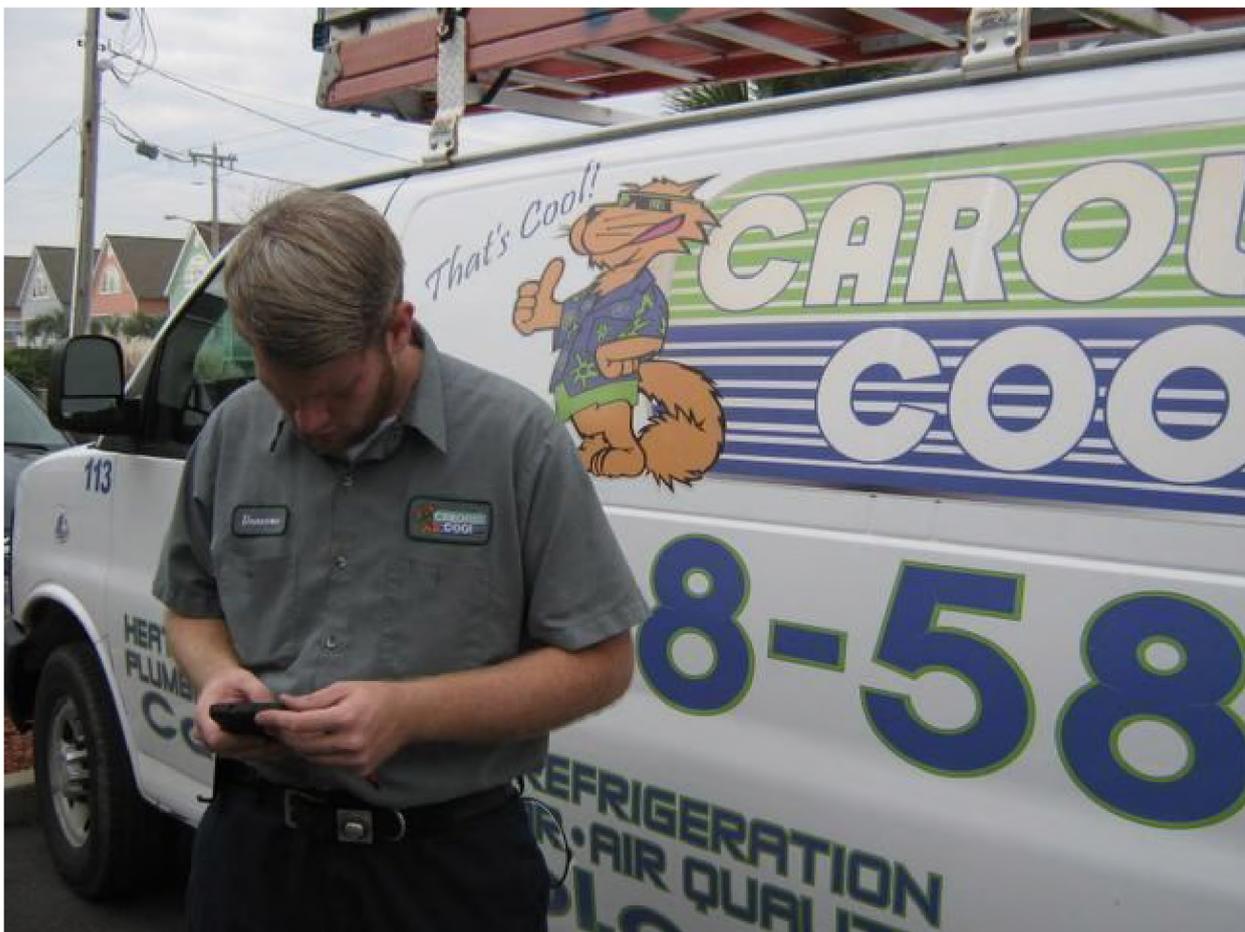
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HVAC tech Donovan Rogers checks for his next job outside his truck in Surfside Beach.

SJONES@THESUNNEWS.COM — By Steve Jones

The Myrtle Beach Metropolitan Area had the sixth highest rate of job growth in the U.S. between August 2013 and August this year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and some say the surge seems to have spread through the economy better than in the past, when such a spurt would have been limited mostly to businesses that catered to the area's huge tourism industry.

While the BLS didn't break down which job sectors created the 5,500 additional jobs it counted, it's safe to say that leisure and hospitality had the bulk of the new jobs due to a rebounding and expanded tourist season. The S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce cited more than 10,000 new leisure and hospitality jobs statewide in its September unemployment report.

It was by far the largest number of additional jobs in any sector statewide during the month, but it is important to note that the DEW number is seasonally adjusted, meaning the actual growth is statistically spread over the year to reduce the ups and downs of things such as seasonal employment.

The recent overall growth along the Grand Strand has been helped by a noticeable influx of retirees, who brought with them an increased demand not only for new homes but also for services such as healthcare where jobs generally pay better than the area's average wage, according to Realtors.

BLS figures compiled for The Sun News by SiteTech Systems show that the metro area, including Brunswick County, saw a 3.44 percent increase in the average annual wage from the first quarter of 2013 to the first quarter of 2014.

The professional and business services sector showed the highest job growth and wage growth when comparing the quarters, according to the SiteTech figures.

Construction work was second in the job growth category, adding more than 600 new jobs, a statistic that won't surprise anyone who has driven along Farrow Parkway in Myrtle Beach or through the fast-growing South Strand.

The BLS jobs growth figures didn't include wage numbers, and the geographic area included in its August-to-August comparison didn't include Brunswick County. Part-time jobs are included in the BLS report.

'Things have changed'

Besides the obvious growth in tourism and construction jobs, there has been a pickup as well in retail business, said Tommy Bouchette, South Carolina president for BNC Bank.

“You can feel that things have changed a lot,” he said. “It looked like it happened pretty quickly.”

Jim Creel Jr., vice president of The Creel Corp. and the incoming board chairman of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, said the company added a call center and 85 new jobs in the past year, but employment in its 14 beachfront properties has remained about the same.

Overall, the company has 1,800 full- and part-time employees, 1,100 of whom are year-round, Creel said.

Creel said he’s heard that the timeshare business has picked up as well, another factor that would contribute to leisure and hospitality job growth.

Creel further noted that the inclusion of Brunswick County into the Myrtle Beach metro area has upped the total population to near the 500,000 mark, a significant benchmark for some businesses looking for areas where they should build stores.

“The area I believe is now on the radar of certain companies that it wouldn’t have been before,” he said.

Additionally, local companies such as Carolina Cool, heating and air conditioning specialist, have seen demand for their services spike during the last year-and-a-half, said owner Verlon Wulf.

Wulf has increased the size of the company’s fleet 30 percent since the first of 2013, and each one of those vehicles creates the need for at least one new employee.

Myrtle Beach native Donovan Rogers is one of those who has benefited.

Rogers’ career path could have been considered classic for many in the area, the first a road job with a company that detailed and sold custom parts for Harley Davidson motorcycles at rallies across the country and then a stint at Medieval Times where he rose to be head bartender.

In the past, people like Rogers may have left the area for better-paying work. But an expanding job market gave him multiple job offers when he finished HVAC schooling at Horry Georgetown Technical College, and he chose a company where he has a living wage now and opportunities for the future.

To expand that horizon even more, Rogers said he’ll start commercial HVAC classes in January.

“There’s room for growth in this company,” he said.

Others have found new employment in the expanding retail market, including the 12 full-time and part-time employees hired at South Carolina’s first Second Cup, which opened this summer in Northwoods Plaza.

Owner/franchisee Dion Dobranski chose a vacant storefront next to the new Fresh Market for what will be the first of 10 Second Cups he’s contracted to open in the state over the next decade.

He chose Myrtle Beach because of the relative lack of competition in nationally-owned coffee chains, but he knows that the area’s huge tourist market offers him the chance to establish the large Canadian chain’s name among consumers throughout the state.

He’s already looking at having a mobile cart next summer to get the brand to beachgoers. There could be new jobs to man the cart.

Additionally, his move from Saskatchewan stimulated the need for other activity that helped to create the need for other jobs. Dobranski said he and his family bought a condominium for the relocation but already they are looking for a single-family home.

MBREDC activity helped

Marc Jordan, CEO of the North Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce, said he’s not surprised by the job growth but is somewhat that it ranks so high nationally.

The Strand’s newest major shopping mecca, the Coastal North Town Center in North Myrtle Beach, opened recently along U.S. 17 North, and a second center is in the planning stages adjoining North Myrtle Beach’s new Park and Sports Complex.

The Coastal North jobs aren’t part of the BLS August-to-August count because the first stores didn’t open until September, but they are part of what people believe will be an even bigger job growth year in 2015.

But about 40 new jobs opened up in the North Myrtle Beach area during the year from the expansion of a specialty tobacco business.

That expansion was aided by the Myrtle Beach Regional Economic Development Corp., which Jordan said deserves part of the credit for the overall job growth.

“Our EDC program stepped it up big time,” he said.

The future

Bouchette said that the Grand Strand has always been a business boom-or-bust kind of place, but he believes the upward trend has enough oomph to carry it for at least a few years.

His bank, for instance, has seen a 20 percent increase in the number of people looking at new or expanded

commercial ventures, he estimated.

Further, Ripley's Aquarium is looking at a major expansion, and construction is underway on two new lodging towers on the oceanfront in Myrtle Beach.

"Those are significant dollars being invested," Stephen Greene, CEO of the Myrtle Beach Area Hospitality Association, said of the construction. Just one of those new highrises could bring a couple of hundred new jobs, he said.

Wulf said the surge he is seeing in HVAC system replacement jobs is at least partly due to pent-up demand from homeowners who kept their temperatures comfortable with repairs during the recession.

Now, they want systems that won't need frequent maintenance or repairs to operate optimally.

Creel and Jordan also cited pent-up demand when talking about job creation activities in other sectors.

Bouchette said he thinks that the continuing growth in new jobs will help push up the area's wage level, as employers have to compete to get or keep workers in a market where jobs are more and more plentiful.

"I think we are really starting to rev up (from the recession)," Greene said. "This is probably the first year in at least five years that it's been this positive."

Read more here: http://www.myrtlebeachonline.com/2014/11/16/4608547_myrtle-beach-metro-area-sees-one.html?sp=/99/209/&rh=1#storylink=cpy

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