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Bacon sharing his passion for Owensboro

By Keith Lawrence Messenger-Inquirer
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Claude Bacon, Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation president and CEO, poses in the EDC boardroom Tuesday at 123 W. Fourth St.

Photo by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer | awarren@messenger-inquirer.com

Claude Bacon is passionate about his adopted hometown.

And he wants to share his enthusiasm with local businesses thinking about expanding and out-of-town companies looking for new locations.

On June 5, the Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corp. unanimously chose Bacon, who had been vice president of administration, sales, marketing and e-commerce for LinGate Hospitality for nearly 16 years, as its new president.

The post had been vacant since September 2022, when Brittaney Johnson resigned after nearly four years to become director of economic development for Big Rivers Electric Corp.



“Claude has a passion for Owensboro and Daviess County,” Amy Jackson, EDC chairwoman, said this week.

She said, “We see that passion, coupled with his relationship building and business acumen, as a win-win-win for everyone. His energy is infectious and his strategic mindset will help us continue to grow the Owensboro-Daviess County economy. He’s the right person at the right time for our organization, and has hit the ground running in the role.”

Bacon, 51, is also chairman of the Owensboro-Daviess County Convention & Visitors Bureau’s board and serves on the executive board of the Kentucky Travel Industry Association.

The CVB and the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum have been working to attract more bluegrass-related businesses to town.

Recently, Rick Faris announced that he would relocate his Faris Guitar Co. from Topeka, Kansas, into the new Kentucky Guitar Works @ the Center for Lutherie in the former bluegrass museum between the RiverPark Center and Owensboro Symphony buildings.

Bacon said landing the first business is always the hardest.

Getting more should be easier.

“I think there’s an incredible opportunity there,” Bacon said. “We’re fortunate to have Steve Johnson working on that.”

Johnson stepped down from his role as vice president of government and community affairs for Owensboro Health Regional Hospital last year to become director of the city’s Bluegrass Music Initiative.

Much of what the EDC does is cloaked in secrecy, which companies looking at sites require.

Surprised at activity

But Bacon said, “In my short tenure here, I’ve been surprised at the activity we’re seeing from the state and from direct leads to our office.”

The Madisonville native spent his first 12 years working in higher education.

And that’s what brought him to Owensboro.

Bacon earned both his bachelors in public relations and marketing, and his masters in communications from Western Kentucky University.

After graduation, he worked in the recycling industry for a year and then was hired as an admissions counselor at Lindsey Wilson College in 1996.

When he left five years later, Bacon was dean of admissions at the college.

He returned to WKU as director of major gift development for the university’s athletics department.

Bacon was asked to come to Owensboro to work on a project for Kentucky Wesleyan College, which led to his becoming dean of admissions and financial aid from 2006 to 2008.

“Those were two incredible years,” he said. “We broke admissions records.”

Bacon had met Glenn Higdon, CEO of Owensboro-based LinGate Hospitality, when he was working for WKU athletics.

In 2008, Higson offered him a job and Bacon got into the hospitality area.

LinGate has developed and/or acquired and managed more than 45 hotel properties through the years including Owensboro’s Courtyard by Marriott and Holiday Inn Riverfront.

“The Courtyard was the first new hotel here in some time,” Bacon said. “We saw the potential of tourism in Owensboro.”

He said he was interested in the EDC job because “economic development leads to a better quality of life for the community.”

Bacon is a runner.

He’s run in two Iron Man triathlons and one 50-mile race.

“I love the culture of fitness,” Bacon said. “It’s a great environment.”

But, he said, “I’m not fast enough to qualify for the Boston Marathon.”

“I hunt, fish, treasure hunt and I’m a collector,” Bacon said.

He’s been a member of First Baptist Church for 17 years, teaches an adult Sunday School class and serves as a deacon.

Bacon and his wife, Samantha, will have been married 22 years in October.

They have two daughters, Maggie Beth, a junior at the University of Kentucky, and Hadley, a junior at Daviess County High School.

“My love for Daviess County is deep,” Bacon said. “We’ve enjoyed our lives here for 18 years. I want to share what I love with others. I take it seriously.

History of turnoverThe EDC has a history of turnover.

But Bacon plans to stay.

What's now the Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce handled economic development as part of its duties until 1986.

That May, Jim Crider, a Texas native, was hired as the first executive vice president of the newly formed Industry Inc.

He left the following year and Fred King took over the post in April 1987.

In 1992, Hugh Haydon was hired to replace King.

Two years later, former Mayor Waitman Taylor took over the duties.

A year later, another former mayor, David Adkisson, took over the combined post of president of both the chamber and Industry Inc.

Taylor stayed on to work with existing industry until 2002.

In 1999, Adkisson moved to Birmingham, Alabama, and Haydon returned to Owensboro in the combined post.

He left in 2002 and Eric Davis headed both agencies until 2005.

In February 2006, Nick Brake became president of the new Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corp.

He left in 2013 to become superintendent of Owensboro Public Schools.

Madison Silvert became president of the EDC in October 2013.

He left in May 2017 to become president of the Owensboro-based Malcolm Bryant Corp.

Helen Mountjoy filled in as interim president.

Mark Snell, an Owensboro native who had spent 30 years working as an attorney in Houston's energy sector, took over the post in September 2017.

He resigned six months later and died in Houston six months after that.

Sharla Wells filled the vacancy on a temporary basis until Brittaney Johnson, a Posey County, Indiana native, began her duties in late 2018.

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