

FirstHealth of the Carolinas is proud to call Moore County home and thankful for the opportunities we have each day to serve patients throughout the Sandhills and beyond.

Headquartered in Pinehurst, our nationally recognized health care system employs more than 6,000 people and serves 15 counties throughout the mid-Carolinas. FirstHealth demonstrates a commitment to treating the whole patient, improving the health of the communities it serves, and we all work each day to fulfill one core purpose — *To Care for People*.

Licensed for four hospitals with 610 beds, the system includes inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, hospice, palliative care, home care, community outreach programs, behavioral health, fitness facilities, primary, specialty and convenient care practices, concierge medicine, a hospitality house, EMS and critical care transport, a foundation, and a host of other services, including our recently opened Cancer Center, which provides care to patients and support for their families.

Moore Regional Hospital, FirstHealth's flagship hospital, is fully accredited and boasts award-winning, quality care. Moore Regional, including its Hoke and Richmond campuses, was recognized in 2023 as one of the nation's 100 Top Hospitals® according to an independent quality analysis provided by PINC AI™ and reported by *Fortune*.

Moore Regional Hospital is the only hospital in North Carolina to earn the prestigious designation as one of the Top 100 hospitals in the United States. This is the third consecutive year and eighth year overall that Moore Regional has been recognized as one of the nation's best hospitals.

While awards demonstrate our commitment to high-quality care, it's the people of FirstHealth who make that care possible. The success of our health system is built on the dedication and tremendous efforts of exceptional employees, providers and volunteers.

As we look to the future in 2024 and beyond, FirstHealth's philanthropic foundation is poised to invest in the future of health care in a new and exciting way.

FirstFutures is designed to combat patient care staffing shortages by providing student aid and financial incentives through the area's community colleges. We aim to educate, train and hire the next generation of our care teams. This effort will extend to local high schools through the FirstFutures Academy, which will identify and mentor students interested in a career in the medical field while opening up scholarships and entry into the workforce following graduation.

I invite you to learn more about our health system by visiting our website at firsthealth.org.

Our communities have continued to support our health care system and for that we are extremely grateful. I hope you enjoy learning about Moore County. It is a special place, and we are thankful to call it home.



Sincerely,

Mickey Foster
Chief Executive Officer
FirstHealth of the Carolinas

FirstHealth Reid Heart Center
Pinehurst

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24-170-0012



SEEING GREEN

Moore County, known for country living, charming small towns and a vibrant economy rooted in tourism and golf, now has a new moniker under its belt: Resilient.

Moore County's reputation as a golf mecca will be on display again in June when Pinehurst No. 2 hosts the U.S. Open for the fourth time.

The United States Golf Association has tagged Pinehurst Resort & Country Club as its anchor site, booking four more Opens there through 2047. The U.S. Women's Open Championship will be played on Pinehurst No. 2 in 2029. The World Golf Hall of Fame is relocating from St. Augustine, Florida, and will open its new headquarters this spring in the new, 6-acre Golf House Pinehurst campus adjacent to the Pinehurst clubhouse, walking distance from the club's courses and the Carolina Hotel.

"The exposure we will get from global TV coverage is great and will benefit our destination in the long run," says Phil Werz, president and CEO of the Pinehurst-Southern Pines-Aberdeen Convention & Visitors Bureau, "but, with 250,000 people expected here that week, we ask that folks support our local businesses all over Moore County."

That quarter-million headcount, Werz says, includes 35,000 fans per day plus vendors, transportation workers, merchandise distributors, "and all the peripheral support a major event like this takes to operate."

The Open has 156 players entered.

Ben Bridgers, general manager



of Pinehurst Resort, says May 27 is the last day No. 2 will be available for regular play. "We close down the 28th, per the USGA," he says. "What's going to happen is, a perimeter will be erected around the facility. They want to make sure nothing happens to it. The course prep already has been happening, and the maintenance team works closely with the USGA to get it compatible with what they want, to make sure we put our best foot forward."



Natalie Hawkins (left) is president of Moore County Economic Development Partnership. USGA's new Golf House Pinehurst is expected to open phase one in May, including its Hall of Fame exhibit.

"The world of golf will be upon us." The countdown began Jan. 8, with a to-do list, to make the entire resort ready. "From an operations standpoint, we have a checklist," Bridgers says, "a timeline where certain areas, like the driving range, will be closed then re-opened. The USGA is in town, so we work with them regularly. It's a total team effort to make sure this goes off without a hitch."

The Hall of Fame has been in Florida since 1998. The Golf House will be one of only two USGA test centers worldwide that tests golf balls and clubs for conformance to the Rules of Golf. "There still is some construction, but it will be open in time," Bridgers says.

The Pinehurst-Southern Pines-Aberdeen CVB website displays a countdown marking the days,

hours, minutes – and seconds – until the Open's first tee shot, and offers a tourist-oriented list of sites around town. Bridgers says guests are playing No. 2 to say they played where the Open will be held. He calculates more than 450,000 merchandise items will be sold that relate to the tournament.

"More than a dozen counties from here to Raleigh to Lumberton and near Charlotte have a demand for hotel rooms and will have people staying an hour or more away," Werz says. "Best rule of thumb: Get tickets and your room as soon as possible.

"There is an air of anticipation and excitement among shop and restaurant owners. What we encourage people coming for the Open to do is to enjoy the golf, but when you leave the course,

be sure to explore the destination. Pinehurst is great, but there are shops and restaurants in Southern Pines, Aberdeen, Carthage, Vass, Cameron and other locales in Moore County that would love to see fans, too."

Bridgers added: "This is America's championship, and it's good that people get to see what we see, this little piece of heaven, every day. People will experience our Southern hospitality, see a champion crowned on Sunday, and tell the stories about all the players they saw. It's quite the spectacle."

ELSEWHERE

Moore County's 10 townships of 11 incorporated communities and seven other census areas display a quality of life that

leans on more than golf: They're home to small manufacturing, a growing healthcare industry, strong community college program and are a welcome mat for small businesses and entrepreneurship.

Grant money also is helping the county. The MacKenzie Scott Foundation donated \$3.5 million in March 2022 toward a Sandhills Habitat for Humanity project on Keyser Street in Aberdeen, for home construction.

The Duke Energy Foundation provided grants last November ranging from \$500 to \$5,000 to help 40 small businesses.

And Golden Leaf, in 2022, provided \$15,000 to Moore County Partners in Progress for a site identification program near the town of Robbins that would be

suitable for industrial development.

"We applied to Golden Leaf and said we could use some help with some business park sites in the northern end of the county, particularly the Robbins area, and we have identified potential sites," says Natalie Hawkins, president of the county's Economic Development Partnership. "Robbins is a small town, and they probably are the most economically distressed community in Moore County, and that's what we want to focus on. There's a lot of opportunity in Robbins, with its proximity to the new Toyota battery plant (under construction) in Liberty and its access to Interstate 74. They have a new boutique hotel in Robbins and great little restaurants. It's a good small-business environment."

In Aberdeen, the Economic Development Partnership is developing Iron Horse Industrial Park, a 73-acre plot with rail access, natural gas and municipal water and sewer. "We can accommodate multiple users or one large user, and we think we can get about 400,000 square feet of space on the site," Hawkins says. The project is expected to cost just under \$2 million, according to an Economic Development Partnership report. "We're going to start clearing the site in February and hope to have the road completed by the end of the year. We've had multiple companies express interest in various industries, like construction and textiles and food processing."

Moore's healthcare access is expanding, as FirstHealth Moore

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Regional adds a health and wellness facility in Carthage this summer. Plans include relocating the Convenient Care Clinic in Whispering Pines to Carthage, where family medicine also will be offered. The Moore Regional network serves 15 counties with a staff of more than 2,700.

Healthcare and social assistance is the county's largest private industry sector, followed by accommodations and food services, and retail trade.

The county's biggest need, Hawkins says, is infrastructure.

"With our projected population growth, we need water, sewer and transportation infrastructure. With the U.S. Open, the Department of Transportation is trying to fit all

its projects in between (2024 and 2029), and we have some big improvements planned," she says. "And we need broadband expansion in the northern part of the county. That's important to our residents, our businesses and our farmers."

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & MILITARY PRESENCE

Entrepreneurship, Hawkins says, is vital in a county where the population has increased by 6,000 residents since 2020. "Right now, we're at 105,000 residents and we're expected to reach 170,000 by 2050," she says. "We were the seventh-fastest growing county in North Carolina last year."

What makes Moore's economy work is to think big by thinking small.

"My organization just hosted an entrepreneurial summit, and we had 200 people there and 40 said they wanted to start their own business, and one has," Hawkins says. "Moore County has a variety of small-business environments, and that's what makes our economy resilient during economic downturns. There are no big factories that are going to lay off hundreds of people at a time. We are in the top 7% nationally in resilient economies for communities of less than 50,000, and our future is bright for all the population that's coming our way."

Part of that population is military, with Moore's proximity to Fort Liberty. According to the Economic Development Partnership, Moore County businesses secured more than \$19.8 million in Department of Defense contracts in 2021. And, 12% of the population that year had served in the armed forces.

"The military is very important to our local economy, and we have a growing defense sector with defense industries and a lot of them started right here in Moore County," Hawkins says.

EDUCATION

A November meeting with the Chamber of Commerce, Sandhills Community College and Moore County Schools was part of the planning process for a new Early College High School program.

"Moore County is projected to continue to grow in terms of population and business. Having a trained workforce is central to this growth," says Sandhills Community College President Dr. Alexander Stewart. "SCC and community



Junction Hall is scheduled to open in 2025 in a historic building on Main Street in downtown Aberdeen, with local and regional cuisine and craft beverages downstairs and event space on its upper level.

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leaders have also engaged with MyFutureNC to help focus our efforts in turning out the degrees and credentials our population will need to attract and retain business and ensure we have the workforce to meet demand.”

Stewart says top fields include construction engineering, advanced manufacturing, automotive and hospitality management. “That’s just to name a few,” he says. “We are blessed to be in an area where people want to live and work. Many people think of the golf and resort industry, but we also have a highly trained military population and are situated in close proximity to the larger projects such as Toyota, VinFast and Wolfspeed.”

The N.C. General Assembly has budgeted \$25 million toward that Early College vocational and technical training initiative.

“This is an excellent time to invest in Moore County’s ability to train the future workforce in the vocational trades,” Stewart says. “The demand is certainly there for people with these skills. We are currently working with the Moore County Schools to determine the scope of the curriculum, and this will drive decision-making for capital projects.

“This will be a unique Early College High School because it will allow students to pursue a high school diploma while working on credentials and certificates as well as two-year degrees. In the

vocational trades and applied sciences programs, many of these are ‘stackable credentials’ which can be earned and applied as a progression to a two-year degree. The partnership with the school system will be critical, and the project also will allow SCC to expand its capacity in these areas.”

And, the area of golf.

Sandhills Community College has a Greenkeepers Apprentice Program in partnership with the USGA.

“The program is the only one of its kind in the nation and is targeted at credentials for the greenkeepers who are really the backbone of the golf course maintenance industry,” Stewart says. “We graduated our

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As part of N.C.'s Year of the Trail in 2023, Moore County hid 200 glass-blown pinecones, made by Starworks in Star, N.C., along its trails. Outdoor recreation generates \$11.8 billion in annual revenue in North Carolina.

first class of 20 on Dec. 14, and a new cohort will begin in January. We believe this program has

real potential to grow.

It really fits a niche for community colleges, and the partnership demonstrates the commitment the USGA has to the advancement of turf grass science and our area."

Sandhills Community College has an enrollment of about 4,000.

"Community colleges have never been as important as they are now. Sandhills offers a multitude of affordable pathways to good-paying, in-demand jobs, as well as transfer opportunities to a four-year college," Stewart says. "As the only institution of higher learning in Moore and Hoke counties, Sandhills Community College is truly an economic engine for growth."

"So we have three key clusters here – healthcare, the golf cluster and of course, the defense," Hawkins says. "That is what we can focus on expanding, because those are our existing strengths. And we're a good place to start a business, and we're looking for people who want that. We have an environment where innovation and creativity can thrive and be successful."

— Kathy Blake is a writer from eastern North Carolina.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PINEHURST-SOUTHERN PINES-ABERDEEN AREA CVB

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STILL SERVING

Moore County veterans become entrepreneurs, business owners.

Brad and Jessica Halling enjoy visiting California’s Napa Valley. For about 10 years now, it’s been their peaceful place.

“We fell in love with it and the intersection of agriculture, manufacturing and food-and-beverage. What more do you want,” Jessica Halling says.

She and Brad, her husband, took a little Napa knowledge and brought it east, to Moore County, where they are co-owners of BHAWK Distillery, opening soon in Southern Pines. “In Moore County, the climate is perfect for aging whiskey, which has long been connected with the military culture,” she says. “George Washington issued whiskey to his troops. Here, outside of Fort Liberty, it seemed like the perfect way to translate that intersection of agriculture and manufacturing and beverage, in this place.”

The Hallings are military veterans.

Moore County has several defense industry companies – Spiritus Systems (tactical gear manufacturer), K2 Solutions (canine defense areas), American Growler (off-highway vehicles), Telum Protection Corp. (exercise support, training, special equipment) – but it also has veterans, who segue their ideas and determination into successful businesses.

BHAWK is one of those.

So is Latitude Builders, a luxury home and retail construction company with sites in Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen, Whispering Pines and

Carthage. The business employs several veterans. About 40% of its clientele are active or retired military.

According to census data, the county had 166 veteran-owned businesses in 2022.

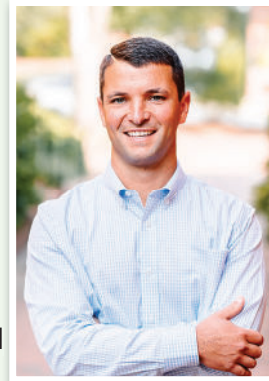
“Throughout this business project, we have encountered so many people, whether it was someone in fiber optics, a cable salesman, or a bookkeeper for an equipment company who wanted to tell Brad and I the stories about their family member in the military,” Halling says, “and we weren’t even open yet.”

BHAWK

“I try to tell people there are different threads to the whiskey story than just the transitioning vet,” Halling says. “There’s the husband-and-wife story. The North Carolina story, with our furniture from High Point. There’s the resilience story, the mental health story, the learning about spirits, raising money. It’s like a bookstore.”

Retired Sgt. Maj. Brad Halling and retired Col. Jessica Halling have a combined 49 years of service in the U.S. Army.

BHAWK is short for Brad Halling American Whiskey Ko. He was deployed to Honduras in 1983, served in the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) with focus on Poland and in 1987 in the Physical Security Support Element – Berlin, prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, and in the 410th Special Forces



Tyler Cook, left, owner and general contractor of Latitude Builders, and Josh Duplex, right, director of construction. Duplex is a Purple Heart recipient.

Detachment in Berlin. He later was deployed to Somalia and fought in the Battle of Mogadishu, depicted in the movie “Black Hawk Down,” and was wounded when a rocket-propelled grenade struck his helicopter. His left leg was amputated above the knee, but he remained on active duty through full Army retirement.

Jessica Halling enlisted in 1991 as a Russian linguist and interrogator and saw active duty as an Army Judge Advocate General in 1998. She has been deployed to Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Korea and elsewhere as senior legal adviser to seven senior military commanders and currently is general counsel to a Silicon Valley cybersecurity firm.

Their business on Yadkin Road, she says, “is the culmination of four years and nine months of my husband and I, every single day, trying to take our vision of gratitude and bring it to life. The designs on the bottles are Brad’s

vision. We're two people, working in concert with each other, sometimes leading and sometimes yielding, and through that partnership, this is what we've ended up with."

The business will have "a heart and a soul," Brad says. The heart being the manufacturing facility, and the soul being the Gratitude Room. "This is where we'll feature someone who has engaged in extraordinary service, either in uniform or public service," Jessica Halling says. The Gratitude Room will be a museum-like tribute to its current honoree, with new whiskey batches labeled to recognize them. Products include Sergeant's Valor, a Gratitude Tribute series, the first honoring the pilots and crew of Super 62, a helicopter struck in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993.

The complex will have a bar and kitchen, patio area with music and an event space.

The Hallings plan a Profiles of Extraordinary Service feature, with opportunities to be part of a discussion led by someone local, where guests can learn and interact.

And they will have Founders Hall. "It's going to tell our entrepreneurial journey, starting in March 2019, how we put together a business plan, how we raised the money, how we gained private investment," Halling says. "We have one institutional investor, one entrepreneurial investor and we

participated in an eight-week intensive review of our plan that culminated at the Pentagon in McLean, Virginia. The story is, how hard it is (to start a business). It's hard. But we are just two Army veterans, and if you have the determination and tenacity and the energy, you can do it."

LATITUDE BUILDERS

Tyler Cook is CEO and founder of Latitude Builders. He graduated from East Carolina University in 2013 and worked in commercial and residential construction. In 2019, he and his wife Emily founded Latitude, which became Southern Pines' turnkey custom builder that won Moore County Home of the Year and Best of the Pines.

Veterans are part of their success story:

Josh Duplex, their director of construction, received a Purple Heart from time served in Afghanistan. Project Manager Jamie Thomas, is retired from the Army, and their selections coordinator's husband is deployed overseas.

Cook says his work also includes constructing homes for injured military and that he sponsors several local fundraisers and charity events that benefit local veterans.

"Our commitment goes beyond construction," he says. "We build lasting relationships and treat our clients as part of our family."

Some of Latitude Builders neighborhoods include Forest Creek, Fairwoods on 7, National #9, Mid South Club, Foxfire's Grande Pines, Seven Lakes West and the Country Club of N.C., according to a company spokesperson. The Cooks estimate more than 100 homes have been built since the business' inception in 2019, with a staff of 11. The current price range for their custom homes are \$1 million-plus.

He recently launched Longitude Planning Group, a landscaping architectural company.

"We're proud to be part of the fabric of Moore County, building custom homes that are as welcoming and genuine as the people who live in them," he says.

For the Hallings, that mission is the same, but different.

"It was really important to create an environment where we could show and convey the true quality of the military veteran and their families, and for private citizens to feel welcome also," Hallings says. "It's important to us to be ambassadors to Southern Pines, to Moore County, and to convey through those images (in the building) the quality of the population we come from." ■

— Kathy Blake is a writer from eastern North Carolina.

BHAWK's Jessica and Brad Halling, both proud veterans.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BHAWK

