

Aspire Has Record \$3.5M In Pledges

By Richard V. Stevens

Ben Kimbrough and Jack Turner once again got down to business and delivered a resounding success for the community they love. After some not-so-gentle persuasion, the legendary Clarksville business leaders agreed last year to co-chair Aspire Clarksville's "Vision for the Future" fundraising campaign, which set a challenging goal of gaining pledges of \$3 million over five years to support economic development in Clarksville and Montgomery County. Wednesday evening, Aspire Clarksville announced that local businesses had pledged \$3.5 million, shattering the goal and previous campaigns by a wide margin.

Mark Holleman, Aspire Foundation chairman, credited forward-thinking business leaders, the leadership of Turner and Kimbrough and the momentum created by the \$1.2 billion Hemlock Semiconductor project for the campaign's success. "The business leaders in Clarksville-Montgomery County have shown their strong commitment to the growth and prosperity of this city-county," Holleman said. "And I want to thank Jack Turner and Ben Kimbrough for their leadership in this campaign."

Kimbrough credited the crowd of business leaders gathered at Clarksville Country Club for the announcement as the key to the campaign's success. "You are responsible for the success we have had," Kimbrough said. "I thank each of you for what you've done and what you are going to do."

Turner said the Aspire message was an "easy sell, because of all we have going for us." "We've been successful in the past, but landing Hemlock gave us new momentum," he said. "This wonderful company gave us a boost at a time when many other parts of the country were struggling in hard times."

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Top goals

- James Chavez, president and chief executive officer of the Economic Development Council, the umbrella agency that coordinates public and private investment in community prosperity, said the Aspire money will be used to carry out a distinct set of strategic objectives. They are:
- Global business development, such as establishing Clarksville as part of a Foreign Trade Zone and recruiting businesses in the photovoltaic energy industry that complement Hemlock Semiconductor.
- Tourism development, such as marketing and recruitment of events and group tours.
- Retail recruitment by generating interest in Clarksville-Montgomery as the home of new shopping venues and restaurants.

Key To Success . . .

Chavez said the 2010 Aspire campaign -- the fourth drive since the initiative began in 1996 -- was remarkable for three main reasons.

"First, Ben and Jack are legendary leaders," he said. "When they get involved, they make sure it's a success. Plus, they did a great job in getting the leaders in their 40s and 50s to get involved and commit to following in their footsteps."

Chavez said this year's campaign also landed commitments from new participants and got existing businesses -- especially industrial stalwarts such as Florim and Bridgestone -- to commit at a higher level than in the past.

Turner summed it up in a quick private interview. "We're really just getting started," he said. "This is a resilient community, a strong community. We've been through a tornado, and now a flood. We pull together, get to work, and we keep getting better. We have a great opportunity now to improve our riverfront and downtown.

"I've been a big proponent of regionalism," Turner added. "We've got the attention of Nashville and the state, plus we have good relationships with Hopkinsville. We're poised to be a regional leader, a regional power. We've got to be smart and keep everyone working together."

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