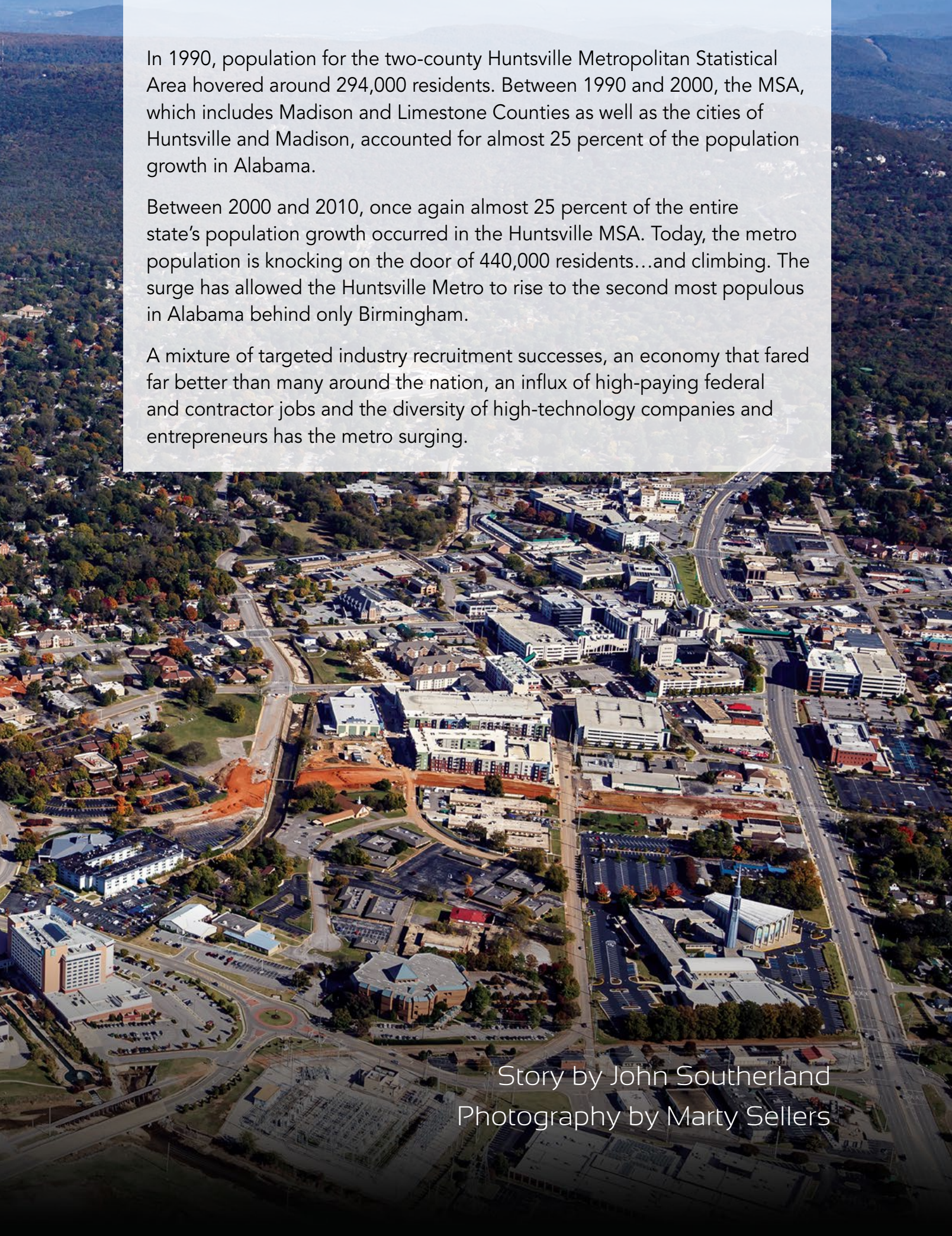


"The growth we have experienced the past year  
has been nothing short of extraordinary, and  
it should not come as a surprise."

Mayor Tommy Battle  
City of Huntsville

metro  
Rising



An aerial photograph of a city, likely Huntsville, Alabama, showing a mix of urban development, green spaces, and infrastructure. A semi-transparent white text box is overlaid on the upper portion of the image, containing three paragraphs of text. The city below features various buildings, parking lots, and roads, with a prominent highway running along the right side. The surrounding area is densely wooded.

In 1990, population for the two-county Huntsville Metropolitan Statistical Area hovered around 294,000 residents. Between 1990 and 2000, the MSA, which includes Madison and Limestone Counties as well as the cities of Huntsville and Madison, accounted for almost 25 percent of the population growth in Alabama.

Between 2000 and 2010, once again almost 25 percent of the entire state's population growth occurred in the Huntsville MSA. Today, the metro population is knocking on the door of 440,000 residents...and climbing. The surge has allowed the Huntsville Metro to rise to the second most populous in Alabama behind only Birmingham.

A mixture of targeted industry recruitment successes, an economy that fared far better than many around the nation, an influx of high-paying federal and contractor jobs and the diversity of high-technology companies and entrepreneurs has the metro surging.

Story by John Southerland  
Photography by Marty Sellers



While the economy has long been driven by the growth of Redstone Arsenal and Cummings Research Park, new sectors and areas are primed for industrial and retail growth. The exponential population growth during the 1950s and 60s saw engineers and scientists flocking to the area to develop and manage the nation's missile and space programs. Long time residents still mention accounts of "building a new classroom a week" during that period. But at no time has there been more economic activity occurring in all areas of the metro than what is happening now.

From industrial to retail, the "classroom a week" catchphrase of the 1960s may be one-upped with "an announcement a week" tagline for the new millennium.

The calendar year started off with a bang (pun intended) with the announcement in February that the Remington Outdoor Company will add a new manufacturing facility in Huntsville – an announcement that generated buzz across the country.

**"With the acquisition of this facility, we plan to create 2,000 jobs in Huntsville over the next decade,"**

said George Kollitides, Chairman and CEO of Remington Outdoor Company. "This additional capacity is essential to fulfill demand and introduce new products. Having watched our company grow from 2,400 employees in 2008 to 4,200 employees by the end of 2013, a five-year, 75-percent increase, it is easy to see why we're investing now."

Remington chose Huntsville over 24 other sites in its quest to find a suitable location for a 900,000-square-foot facility. And Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley said the ripple effect of such an announcement would benefit all of Alabama.

"The Alabama workforce, our business climate and our quality of life continue to make Alabama extremely attractive to companies. Our relationship with Remington is just beginning, and I look forward to a continued partnership with the company."

In 2013, Remington made significant strides including expanding its ammunition facility, increasing its firearm capacity, winning a multitude of highly competitive military and law enforcement contracts, launch-



ing its 1816 lifestyle brand, and introducing a series of exciting new products such as Ultimate Defense Handgun Ammunition and the 783 bolt action rifle. All of which helped lead Remington to record sales.

"We are capitalizing on this momentum by strengthening our positions across the board," said Kollitides. "With demand for our products at an historic high and more new product launches planned for 2014 than ever before in our 200-year history, we are investing in the future."

The Huntsville expansion provides for future needed capacity to support existing product demand and a robust new product pipeline. Huntsville's extensive history as a high tech, research and technology hub lends itself to Remington's internal R&D efforts for design, development and testing of new products.

Fast forward from the Remington announcement in February to another major development that occurred in the MSA in October – the grand opening of the new \$58 million, 5-story, 250,000 sq. ft. Intergraph headquarters in Madison that will add an additional 300 jobs, that will increase employment to more than 1,200.

While the two companies compete in

completely different industries, Remington and Intergraph have some shared characteristics: facilities and amenities for employees.

Remington, refurbishing the old Chrysler building near Huntsville International Airport, is treating its new facility as an innovation center with modern amenities and shared spaces. Since Remington will be designing and testing new products in the facility, innovation will be a central part of its culture as well, according to Vice President of Operations Trip Ferguson – who described the building redesign and shared open collaboration space as "Google for Guns". The facility will include relaxation space designed to allow collaboration and innovation to naturally occur. It will also have break rooms, an on-site cafeteria and other employee amenities.

Intergraph's facility features a 24/7 recreation area furnished with gaming equipment designed to give employees mental breaks. Meetings can be held in the cafeteria...or wherever they happen. The entire facility is treated as each employee's "workspace" said Intergraph Executive Vice President of Human Resources Ed Porter.

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Bridge Street Town Centre (above) and future site of Cabela's (below) 2014 © SellersPhoto.com





Throughout the company's 45-year history, Intergraph employees worked in different buildings designed for functionality and compartmentalized by divisions and programs. Today all employees will be together in a unique and collaborative environment.

"For the first time in Intergraph's history, we are bringing employees at this location together under one roof, which I'm confident will foster innovation and camaraderie," says Hexagon President and CEO Ola Rollén. "The building is a testament to Hexagon's commitment to Intergraph and the Madison County business community."

But it is not only "cool facilities and cool spaces" being constructed around the metro. It's a cultural shift across a wide variety of industry and retail. While there are always challenges in protecting the various retail corridors within the local municipalities, the one word that could be used to describe all of the activity is "energy" according to Lucia Cape, the Chamber's vice president of economic development.

**"There is as much activity here as we have ever seen – and more diverse than ever. The expansion of existing companies and recruitment of new industry leads to high interest in retail development."**

Retail looks at population growth. Population growth occurs by adding new jobs. It seems like each week there is an announcement for a retail project somewhere in the MSA. And this is thanks in part to the regional partnership across the metro that works to expand the area's infrastructure to support each development," Cape said.

And the number of retail development announcements and projects continues to swell. Consider:

Cabela's recently announced it would build its first Alabama retail store in Huntsville. The site preparation for the hunting, fishing and outdoor gear retailer has already started in the planned Parkside Town Centre located across from Bridge Street Town Centre. Soon afterward the City of Huntsville celebrated the grand opening of the



*Intergraph's new building (top left), Village of Providence (top right)*







and Twickenham Square (below)

2014 © SellersPhoto.com



\$20 million Belk at Bridge Street. Other recent announcements at Bridge Street included the opening or planned opening of several new stores and restaurants, including Texas de Brazil, Dicky's Barbecue Pit, Bravo! Cucina Italiana and in the spring, the popular Homewood-based Steel City Pops.

In October, Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle announced a \$70 million hotel/residential/retail project for the former downtown Holiday Inn site. The project, Big Spring Square, will include a 100-room boutique hotel, 200 residential units, retail property and restaurants.

Other projects in and around downtown Huntsville include the \$50 million Whole Foods Market at the new Shops at Merchants Walk development. The organic and natural food chain will be the anchor tenant in the 100,000 sq. ft. shopping center that broke ground in 2014.

The \$100 million Twickenham Square, a live-work-shop development in downtown Huntsville anchored by the Artisan Square Apartment, a Publix supermarket and a Homewood Suites hotel, is nearing completion as shops and restaurants such as Cajun Steamer Bar & Grill and others are slated to fill in the remaining available space.

Likewise, commercial developer Scott McLain said negotiations continue with the planned \$180 million Constellation live, work and shop development just to the west of the Von Braun Center that would include 280,000 sq. ft. of office space, new restaurants and shops, a new hotel and 150 apartments.

The Village of Providence has also continued its growth of restaurants, homes and retail shops. Founded in late 2003, the mixed-use neighborhood includes numerous restaurants, retail shops, offices, a Homewood Suites hotel, a SpringHill Suites by Marriott hotel, high-end condos and hundreds of residential lots and growing.

Lendon, a mixed use development under construction in South Huntsville, will include a 400,000 square foot shopping complex with 19 retail parcels in the main center and 11 restaurants or retail out-parcels. The adjacent planned residential community will include a variety of house types, sizes and styles with interconnected walkways and a live, work, play culture similar to the Village of Providence.

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Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle said each area of Huntsville is poised for significant growth and that recruiting, planning and execution have made it possible.

“The growth we have experienced the past year has been nothing short of extraordinary, and it should not come as a surprise,” Battle said. “We have everything companies are looking for including prime land, strong infrastructure, a skilled workforce, and a quality of life that is second to none. Retailers new to our market further recognize the growth and purchasing power in Huntsville. We are pleased our citizens can access the variety of shopping choices found in most major cities.”

In Madison – the biggest retail announcement of all was made in late summer when local and state officials announced the \$400 million Town Madison development, which will include 900,000 sq. ft. of retail space, 450,000 sq. ft. of office space, 445 hotel rooms and 668 apartments. This development will also create new roads, and an interstate interchange on about 700 acres alongside I-565 and Zierdt Road.

The entire Huntsville Metro will benefit from all of the retail and industrial projects, said Madison County Commission Chairman Dale Strong.

**“Over the past year our community has announced over 3,000 new jobs, a combined investment in new school construction of \$300 million and over \$400 million in new road projects.**

I firmly believe that these investments along with the positive jobs news and hundreds of millions of dollars in new commercial development show that our economy is strong and our community will continue to invest in growth,” Strong said.

“The high bond ratings for Madison County that were recently announced are a reflection of the sound policies that this Commission has put in place to increase accountability and spend taxpayer money wisely. We will continue to do more with less and make investments to bring new jobs,

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*Retail developments in Madison at Highway 72 and Nance Road (above),*







Huntsville High School / Freshman Academy and future site of Whole Foods (above) and The University of Alabama in Huntsville (below) 2014 © SellersPhoto.com





support our schools and improve the quality of life across our County and all six cities that call Madison County home,” he said.

While Remington was the largest of the industrial project announcements, several notable expansions are helping to create the buzz that attract more industry and more retail options. Science and Engineering Services executives were joined by local and state leaders at the Farnborough Air Show this past summer to announce a \$70 million expansion of its manufacturing operation at the former Dunlop Tire plant. The company, which provides support and maintenance, repair and overhaul services to military, commercial and unmanned aircraft, will add 450 jobs over the next three years.

General Electric Intelligent Platforms expanded in 2014 by adding a new production

facility and 50 jobs at its Huntsville facility.

The Verizon Wireless announced last spring that it would hire an additional 300 workers at its call center in Huntsville.

Add to the industry and retail growth new energy and buzz attached to downtown Huntsville and downtown Madison, both featuring new events, concerts, gatherings and activities each week, and it is easy to see why residents are seeing radical changes.

Alex Moore, recruiting manager for Curse, Inc., spent eight years living in Austin, Texas before moving to Huntsville. What she sees happening in the metro area now reminds her of the growth and culture of Austin.

“I am a Texan born and raised, and I spent a lot of time visiting family and friends in Austin before I moved there for college. The Huntsville area has so many of the same char-

acteristics of a younger Austin. Huntsville has the same government and technology foundation that Austin originally had in place 20 to 30 years ago. Once the abundance of technical talent became known to companies or entrepreneurs outside of Austin, they started either opening up offices there or starting a company there knowing they could hire the talent they needed locally,” Moore said.

“Another similarity I see is the artistic culture. It’s so important for people to see the work/life balance in a community if they are considering moving themselves, or their companies there.

**So the fact that people can enjoy the arts in the community they live in outside of work is important.**

Beautiful terrain and outdoorsy fit and culture are also similar – people are increasingly paying attention to their health, so opportunities to enjoy nature and stay fit exist in both areas,” she said. “And the growing craft brewery and local food/restaurant/bar culture is really similar. People in Austin love supporting local businesses – it makes them prideful about where they live and what great food and beverages are made there. I see a similar culture here. The fact that both areas have similar local food and beverage cultures is awesome.”

And more growth looks to be on the horizon, according to Cape. The community and state continue to work a number of projects that could continue the dramatic growth for years to come. “Working alongside the Alabama Department of Commerce, TVA, Huntsville Utilities and all of our economic development partners across the region, we are working more projects together than ever,” she said.

“The Huntsville metro is definitely on the radar of companies and site selection consultants. Our current projects are a good balance of new companies and expansions. Nearly half are commercial, and nearly two-thirds are manufacturing. Because of the high-tech economy, skilled workforce and solid infrastructure, we are very active right now.”

Metro rising indeed.

• John Southerland



The Lendon Development in Jones Valley 2014 © SellersPhoto.com