

## Richard Beard's focus: Enhancing Greensboro's sports tourism economy

*Chairman for 2023 has long relationship with GMA, amateur sports*

**M**arch Madness is right around the corner, so a lot of Piedmont Triad residents have college basketball on their minds. Richard Beard is one of them.

But he's also thinking about other amateur sports events, like the ACC Swimming and Diving Championships, the Y Nationals (more swimming), Youth Soccer, AAU Junior Olympics, and the World University Games.

The ACC Swimming and Diving Championships are set for mid-February. The World University Games that Beard just added to his calendar will be in summer 2029.

And every one of those events, plus oodles more, will take place in Greensboro. They all are top of mind for Beard, who last summer became president and CEO of the Greensboro Sports Foundation.

Beard is also chairman of GMA and FirstPoint for 2023, leading the board of directors for both organizations.

The leadership role at the



Richard Beard is president of the Greensboro Sports Foundation and 2023 board chairman for GMA and FirstPoint.

Greensboro Sports Foundation was a logical step for Beard. He supported amateur sports activities for years, working with and leading the Tournament Host Committee. That group marshalled resources of all sorts, from corporate sponsors to individual volunteers, to support ACC and NCAA basketball tournaments at the Greensboro Coliseum Complex.

The Tournament Host Committee was folded into



a new entity, the Greensboro Sports Foundation, in preparation for the 2020 ACC and NCAA basketball tournaments. Everything was set for another successful execution of Tournament Town, the Coliseum Complex's

branding that builds on Greensboro unique capacity as a basketball tournament venue.

"Then we got to March 12, 2020, when the world came to an end," Beard says. "Or at least the ACC Tournament did," with the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The cancellation of the ACC Men's Basketball Tournament, as well as the first-round NCAA Men's Tournament action, nixed

"our Tournament Town Trifecta in 2020," he says. That year's ACC Women's Basketball Tournament successfully concluded before the Covid-19 shutdown.

"So," Beard says, "we're excited that we were afforded all three tournaments again in 2023."

Triad residents are used to having top-tier college basketball action at the Greensboro Coliseum, so they may not realize how unique the Trifecta really is.

"Once again, we'll have three consecutive weeks of championship basketball, which is unprecedented," Beard emphasizes. "It's the third time we've done it. But Greensboro is the only one that has."

Madison Square Garden, which Beard visited recently for the first time, hasn't hosted such a basketball trifecta. Nor has Barclays Center in Brooklyn, scene of the 2022 ACC Men's Basketball Tournament. Nor has Charlotte or Atlanta or Chicago or Dallas or Los Angeles.

The Tournament Town Trifecta is Greensboro's distinction. "It speaks volumes about our sports tourism,"

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*Trends is a publication of the Guilford Merchants Association.*



### East Greensboro insights

Mac Sims of East Greensboro NOW briefs GMA members about the activities of the non-profit community development organization he leads. Sims spoke at a Center City AM Briefing. More photos, page 3.



## Join a networking group to up your game

Many would agree that a warm referral beats cold calling by a wide margin. What if you had a team of business associates finding warm leads for you?

Leads groups, referral groups and networking groups are interchangeable terms describing weekly meetings of business professionals focused on referring new opportunities to one another.

Membership helps build rapport and trust among colleagues. In time, those members may introduce you to their circle of influence.

GMA has three networking groups. The first was created in 1994.

Each week, members get the spotlight to describe their company and product. Each person gives a more in-depth presentation a few times a year. Mutual success is the goal.

Rob Whitestone of Cottman Transmission has been in GMA's Friday C.A.N. group since 2004.

"Friday mornings are the best," he says. "We learn from members who are experts in their field. We support each other, help develop business, and provide connections. Members have become great friends as well."

GMA's groups are category exclusive and require an application to join. More information: 336-378-6350 or mbolick@mygma.org.



Joan Rogers of Compass Insurance Services.

## Networking brought her to GMA, keeps her involved

Connections and networking always make a difference in business. For example, a successful independent insurance agent.

When a round of layoffs pushed her out of a benefits position with a payroll sales company, she transitioned to insurance sales. Her brother, a veteran of the insurance field, "helped me get things set up and running," she says. That boost, plus her background in benefits, gave her a head start on her new career path.

Her company, Compass Insurance Services, focuses on health insurance and group benefits.

It was networking that introduced Rogers to GMA, where she is a regular volunteer at GMA events. For this example, we must scroll back to 2015.

Rogers, an alumna of Florida Southern University, was attending a sports event where she met a fellow Florida Southern graduate who also lives in Alamance County.

"He told me about GMA and invited me out to one of the events," Rogers recalls.

"I had a really good time, and it was just a really great opportunity to meet other people."

The person extending the invitation was Mark Podolle of Wireless Ventures, a GMA member who frequently takes advantage of the organization's networking and business education opportunities.

Rogers soon became a GMA member and quickly explored the

### VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

options to become more deeply involved.

She joined the Competitive Advantage Networking group, better known as the CAN group. It's one of the formal networking groups sponsored by GMA. Rogers remained a CAN member for several years, until family responsibilities pulled her away.

Rogers became a GMA volunteer early in her membership, and she continues to volunteer regularly.

She can often be found wearing a necklace of blinking lights as a facilitator for "the sticker game" at GMA events.

"It came up one day that GMA was looking for volunteers, and I've always been that kind of person," she says.

Being a sticker game facilitator, or flasher, she says, "gives me an opportunity to meet people and find out what they do. It also gives me a chance to be 'off the wall,' so to speak."

All the while, Rogers is making mental notes and looking for opportunities to make connections, not just for herself, but for others.

"I've done that quite a bit," she says, "especially being a flasher ... just introducing people to other people."

Joan Rogers  
Compass Insurance Services, LLC  
984-377-3709  
CompassInsuranceNC@gmail.com



Members of GMA's BIZ-Links Networking group, photographed recently at GMA. Seated: Michelle Bolick, GMA; Beth Foshie, KCA Recruiting; Holly Holliday, Holliday Creative; Chris Villa, Carolina Digital. Standing: Scott Graham, Alpha Omega; Jarrod Burcham, First Bank; Jeff Shell, The Health Insurance Shoppe; Scott Elkins, M7 Technology Solutions; Jay Brower, Allen Tate; Tom Needham, Tom Needham Insurance Agency; Gene Dolan, Culinary Visions Catering; Cecil Mills, Coeco Office Systems; Not pictured: John Payne, N.C. Zoo.

## Outgoing chairman

GMA/FirstPoint President & CEO Mark Prince (left) poses with Clarence McDonald of Wells Fargo, GMA board chairman for 2022. They were photographed at a holiday event for the GMA board of directors.



President & CEO	G. Mark Prince
Vice President	Michelle Bolick
Operations/Special Events Coordinator	Monzi Jimenez
Membership Development	Sharon Smith
Administrative Assistant	Melinda Thomas

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Publication Coordinator – Michelle Bolick  
Phone (336) 378-6350

225 Commerce Place, Greensboro, N.C. 27401  
www.mygma.org

The Guilford Merchants Association is a nonprofit organization founded in 1906. The Association is a business membership organization focused on supporting member companies with educational programming, lead generation activities, marketing opportunities, and overall enrichment while serving as a catalyst for community growth and prosperity.



## Annual Dinner speaker is one of NFL's most honored athletes – and he's into NASCAR, too

**E**mmitt Smith, owner of three Super Bowl championship rings and the NFL's record for most career rushing yards, will be guest speaker at GMA's 117th Annual Dinner on March 27 at the Sheraton Greensboro Hotel.

Smith was a first-round NFL draft pick in 1990 after choosing to forego his senior year at the University of Florida. He then spent 13 seasons



Emmitt Smith played for the Florida Gators before turning pro.

with the Dallas Cowboys as a running back. He's the only running back to win a Super Bowl championship, the NFL rushing crown, the NFL Most Valuable Player award, and the Super Bowl MVP Award, all in the same season (1993).

The Annual Dinner is GMA's major social event of the year and the occasion that marks the transition of leadership as the new chairman of the board takes over. The event is attended by hundreds of GMA

members and community leaders. A social hour precedes the event in the hotel's largest banquet hall.

GMA member David Parrish, of New Page Capital, headed the committee that selected Smith to appear at the Annual Dinner. Smith stood out, Parrish said, not just because of his unequaled career as an athlete. "He's had a good post-career, as well," Parrish says.

Smith has business interests in real estate, construction, and technology. He has a particular interest in reaching out to underserved youth, providing educational opportunities and unique experiences for them on a national level. He's involved in charitable outreach in the Dallas area, where he still resides.

And he has a North Carolina connection.

Smith is a co-owner of Jesse Iwuji Motorsports. The Mooresville-based NASCAR team races in the Xfinity Series and has a STEM education outreach program designed to bring more diversity and inclusion into the sport.

Smith, the father of five, won ABC's "Dancing with the Stars" during its third season. He's the author of "Game On," an account of the principles that guided him to success in football as well as in his other endeavors.

Annual Dinner tickets are available online at [mygma.org](http://mygma.org). For additional information, contact GMA Vice President Michelle Bolick at 336-378-6350.



Greensboro Council Member Dr. Goldie Wells (left) chats with Dede Potter of Mi-Box.

## Snapshots: Center City AM Briefing



Melanie Jones, executive director of Guilford 911, emceed the December 13 meeting. Left: Speaker Mac Sims.



## Holiday member benefit

GMA members received a special holiday benefit at December's Free Day Friday event. Kimberly Vaughan of The Original Relocation Guide (right) holds poinsettias, which were available to members at New Garden Landscaping & Nursery, courtesy of GMA. Seated at the table is GMA staffer Sharon Smith.

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## Visit High Point takes leadership role in city's transformational economy

**H**igh Point residents may not realize it, but when they invite friends from out-of-town to see the High Point Rockers play at Truist Point ball park, they are helping execute Melody Burnett's master plan.

The same is true when locals recommend the Qubein Children's Museum to Triad friends looking for a day trip, or the John Coltrane International Jazz and Blues Festival to music lovers out of state or overseas.

"We're giving locals a job to do," says Burnett, president of Visit High Point. It's all part of positioning the city as "a vibrant destination that visitors will enjoy and that locals will want to promote. We're giving locals a job within our mission."

The over-arching goal of Visit High Point, formerly known as the High Point Convention and Visitors Bureau, is still to bring visitors and their dollars to the Piedmont Triad's third-largest city.

However, Visit High Point tweaked its mission statement three years ago to "recognize that the destination development work we're doing" ties into the economic development transformation that is reshaping High Point.

Much of that transformation is within walking dis-

### LOYAL MEMBER

tance of Visit High Point's welcome center on North Main Street.

The Qubein Children's Museum has been open less than a year and has already welcomed 140,000 visitors. High Point's first social district, a designated area where it's permissible to stroll with an alcoholic beverage in a special cup while visiting participating restaurants and bars, opened last year.

Congdon Yards, neighboring Truist Point, transformed a former manufacturing facility into a multi-purpose development with restaurants, gathering spaces, and a development lab for furniture innovators.

Close by is the High Point University campus, as are the many showrooms of the High Point Market.

These latter two are the city's main economic drivers. "What's really profound is that we have newer attractors nestled right in between. The connection is tighter than ever. There are fewer gaps between those two economic engines," Burnett says.

Burnett says GMA membership helps Visit High Point stay connected with



Melody Burnett is president of Visit High Point, the city's convention and visitor's bureau.

### About that chair logo...

**T**here's a reason that the chair in the Visit High Point logo looks familiar. More than likely, you've seen it before.

Air travelers at Piedmont Triad International Airport pass the chair in a display sponsored by The Phillips Collection, the High Point contemporary furniture firm that markets it.

Created by a Thai designer, the chair's eye-catching woven seating surfaces are made of seat belt webbing.

The unusual chair has been seen by millions, thanks to a starring role in "The Hunger Games," the 2012 movie that spawned a trilogy.

Visit High Point adopted the "seat belt chair" for its logo, Melody Burnett says, because the chair is "highly designed and art-centric, which really lends itself to the creative class."

"We want people to look at High Point as a

place where creative talent is nurtured through art and design."

The chair also speaks to High Point's leadership in the home furnishings industry.

The seat belt chair on display at PTIA is brilliant red. The Visit High Point welcome center's example is High Point University purple.

Visitors, Burnett says, often ask if they may try it out and sit in it. And, of course, they're allowed.

After all, the Visit High Point slogan is "make yourself at home."



High Point's Qubein Children's Museum.

Visit High Point  
1634 N. Main St., Suite 103  
High Point, N.C. 27262  
visithighpoint.com  
(336) 884-5255





# Sports tourism has major impact in Greensboro

Amateur sports events bring tens of thousands of athletes, family members, and fans to Greensboro every year.

The Greensboro Sports Foundation, led by President Richard Beard, helps coordinate Greensboro's unique infrastructure of sports facilities and hundreds of volunteers, to make these events possible.

Greensboro's world-class facilities include the Greensboro Coliseum Complex and Aquatic Center, as well as N.C. A&T State University's track and field complex.

The Bryan Park Soccer Complex, Spencer Love Tennis Center, and numerous

other facilities make the city competitive for amateur sports events of all kinds.

The AAU Junior Olympics, for example, returns to Greensboro in 2024. Last year, some 18,000 athletes participated in the event in Greensboro. That figure, Beard points out, does not include coaches or family members, all of whom purchase hotel accommodations, meals, gasoline, and make other expenditures during their stay.

The economic impact of the eight-day event was estimated at \$38 million, according to the Greensboro Convention and Visitors Bureau.

## 2023 chairman

Continued from page 1

Beard says.

GMA was a major supporter of the Tournament Host Committee. That relationship led to Beard being nominated to join the GMA/FirstPoint board, he says. GMA continues to support sports tourism and the Greensboro Sports Foundation's role in economic development.

Beard was an economic developer in Roanoke, Virginia, before returning to his hometown to take a similar role with the Greensboro Chamber more than 25 years ago. He later was a

partner in a commercial real estate firm. He retired in 2021, only to find his volunteer sports activities evolve into his current full-time position.

Now he's focused on "taking sports tourism to another level" and recognizing the role of volunteers in the community's success. Greensboro's hundreds of volunteers "really need to give themselves a pat on the back."

Greensboro Sports Foundation  
Greensborosf.com  
336-378-4499



Olympic Gold Medalist Nathan Chen competing at 2020 U.S. Figure Skating Championships at the Greensboro Coliseum.



N.C. State University Wolfpack, champions of the 2022 ACC Women's Basketball Tournament at the Greensboro Coliseum.



2020 U.S. Figure Skating Championships at the Greensboro Coliseum.



Photos courtesy Greensboro Coliseum Complex

Synchronized National Championships, USA Diving (2015) at the Greensboro Aquatic Center.



A competitor at the USA Gymnastics American Cup (2013), Greensboro Coliseum.



## Building relationships key to success for family-owned electrical contractor

**S**tarr Electric Co.'s decision to join GMA brings together two of the area's oldest business entities.

Family-owned Starr Electric was founded in 1928, making this the 95th year for the Greensboro firm.

GMA traces its roots to 1906 and the formation of the Central Bureau of Credits, created to serve Greensboro merchants. GMA's birthday cake this year will have 117 candles.

Nick Raimondi, a New Jersey native who has lived in Greensboro for more than two decades, is the person responsible for bringing Starr Electric and GMA together.

### Background

Raimondi, a business development manager for Starr, previously worked in the construction business as a project manager. He knew Starr Electric as a contractor, helping build out facilities for clients.

The electrical contractor,



Nick Raimondi was a construction project manager before joining Starr Electric Co. last year.

he says, made an impression for its commitment to excellence and interest in on-going relationships. Starr was never, Raimondi says, "a one-and-done type of company."

So when the opportunity came for Raimondi to join Starr Electric last year, he jumped at it.

### NEW MEMBER PROFILE

#### What he does

"I'm actually in the relationship business. I go and meet potential clients and existing clients to see what the need is. We do everything from new construction

to upfits to service work. The only thing we don't do is residential."

#### Capabilities

"We're an all-in-one company. We've got construction (people) and engineers. We do 3D modeling. We do modular construction. We've got a prefab department; we'll actually build what we

can, internally; then bring it to the job site to save time."

#### Team and locations

"We're tipping the scales at just about 400 employees. Our home office is in Greensboro. We've also got offices in Charlotte, Raleigh, Fayetteville, and Columbia, S.C."

#### On GMA

"I'd been to some GMA networking events previously. I liked what I saw there. Once I had the opportunity to decide who I network with, I jumped at the chance to get in with GMA.

"It's always an inviting atmosphere at all of their events. It's a team. I'm a team player. I gravitate toward those atmospheres. That's what networking is, right? They do a really good job of that."

Starr Electric Co.

336-275-0241

NRaimondi@starrelectric.net

www.starrelectric.net

## HPU Elevator Pitch contest rewards students for promising business ideas

**T**he Elevator Pitch: That oh-so-brief opportunity when an entrepreneur has the opportunity to convince others that their startup business idea is worthy of an investment.

High Point University has an annual Elevator Pitch Competition for students, and the event has real-world implications. The winners are awarded with cash to develop their business to the next level.

GMA/FirstPoint was a major sponsor of the event.

The top award in the fall 2022 competition, \$8,000, went to Sean Martin, a junior from Maryland majoring in entrepreneurship. He calls his invention the

Kap Popper. It's a device to help a person with limited strength open a twist-off plastic bottle top, the type that often contains medications.

Martin was inspired by a relative who was left impaired following a stroke.

GMA President and CEO Mark Prince sat on the panel of judges who heard 25 students present a two-minute elevator pitch and then chose the winners.

"There were all kinds of ideas for products and services" being pitched, Prince said.

"They had just two minutes, and we couldn't ask any questions. It was somewhat similar to (the televi-



Photo courtesy High Point University

sion show) 'Shark Tank.'"

Prince was one of three judges tasked with picking the most deserving ideas, pitched by the most passionate individuals.

The other judges were Kendall Holbrook, CEO at Dev Technology Group, Inc. and Timothy McLoughlin, a partner at Cofounders Capital.

The second-place award of \$5,000 went to Cameron Labrecque, senior entrepreneurship major from Massachusetts. Labrecque created software and a companion

website called Rememery, which help an individual preserve memories and significant life events that can be shared with and passed on to younger generations.

Lauren McAtee took the third-place award of \$3,000 for the invention she calls DePawsit.

McAtee, a senior entrepreneurship major from Raleigh, created the product to solve a problem often encountered by people walking their dogs. DePawsit is a retractable dog leash with a built-in waste bag dispenser

and bag sealing mechanism. It reduces the chance of losing control of your pet while performing clean-up duties.

Awards of \$1,000 were presented to Savannah Smith for her invention, HatEase, which helps secure your hat in high winds or during action sports, and to the team of Quentin Barrial and Kelsey Barker, for QuickTag. The product uses a QR code to place on personal items so they might be reunited with their owners if lost.

GMA President & CEO Mark Prince (left) was a judge in the Elevator Pitch Competition at High Point University.



# Leverage power of social media to deliver top-flight customer service

By ADRIENNE CREGAR JANDLER

Social media has become an integral part of our daily lives. Many companies use social platforms to connect with, and market to, their customers; but social media also can be a key channel for customer service.

The trend isn't just one of convenience for companies; it's becoming expected among consumers. In fact, according to a study by Sprout Social, 72 percent of consumers expect a brand to



Jandler

## BUSINESS SUCCESS

respond to their social media inquiry within an hour. If you haven't considered utilizing social media as a means to provide customer service, here are some tips for getting started.

### Monitor for customer inquiries and complaints

Streamline your efforts by setting up monitoring tools, which enable you to track mentions of your brand, product, or service on social platforms. This allows you to respond quickly, ensuring customers feel heard and val-

ued. (Be sure you respond to positive comments as well as the negative ones; you want to encourage kudos as well as addressing problems.)

### Create a dedicated customer service account

Setting up a separate customer service account allows customers to clearly identify where they should direct their questions or complaints. This also allows you to keep track of customer interactions in one place.

Airbnb set up @AirbnbHelp, where they provide support and answer customer inquiries related to bookings, accounts, and other issues. Other examples include @

Uber\_Support, @Spotify-Cares, and @AmazonHelp.

### Use automation

Tools such as chatbots can be used to respond quickly to customer inquiries and provide answers to frequently asked questions. This not only saves time but also ensures that customers receive prompt and correct responses.

### Use social media for customer education

Social media can be used to educate customers about key aspects of your products and services. Consider creating helpful content such as tutorial videos, screencasts, troubleshooting videos, or

FAQs that you can distribute through social media.

### Encourage customer feedback

Gather customer feedback in real-time. This can be done through surveys, polls, or asking customers to share their experiences with a specific product or service. It's a great way to gain valuable insights directly from the people who use your products while also showing customers that their input matters.

*Adrienne Cregar Jandler is president of Atlantic Webworks.*

336-855-8572

[www.atlanticwebworks.com](http://www.atlanticwebworks.com)

## Put these upcoming GMA events on your calendar

**Friday, February 10**  
**Noontime Network**  
11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
Hilton Garden Inn Airport

**Tuesday, February 14**  
**Center City AM Briefing**  
8–9 a.m.  
GMA Community Room

**Wednesday, February 15**  
**Risers Lunch Meet Up**  
12:30–1:30  
Core Life Eatery, Greensboro

**Tuesday, February 21**  
**Teach Me Tuesday**  
11:45 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
GMA Community Room

**Wednesday, February 22**  
**New Member Orientation**  
11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
GMA Community Room

**Tuesday, March 7**  
**After Work Network**  
4:30–6:30 p.m.  
Hanes Lineberry

**Friday, March 10**  
**Free Day Friday**

**Wednesday, March 15**  
**Risers Lunch Meet Up**  
12:30–1:30 p.m.  
Location TBD

**Friday, March 17**  
**Meet & Eat**  
11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
GMA Office

**Monday, March 27**  
**GMA Annual Dinner**  
5:30 p.m.  
Koury Convention Center



2023 MEMBER



PEOPLE CONNECTIONS SUCCESS

### Display your membership plaque

Your membership plaque tells customers and visitors to your place of business that you are a part of a community business association that goes back well over 100 years. It's a sign that you are well connected within the community and endorse the goals to GMA to serve people, create connections, and foster success. Membership plaques for 2023 have been mailed to all GMA members. To learn more about the benefits of GMA membership, contact Vice President Michelle Bolick: [mbolick@mygma.org](mailto:mbolick@mygma.org) or 336-378-6350.

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