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New Charleston Area Alliance chairman eager to move forward

By Caitlin Cook



Mike Basile

As recently elected Charleston Area Alliance chairman, Mike Basile feels as though he is returning to his roots.

The Fairmont native worked on economic development at the state level from 1993 to 1997, serving in the state's development office and as Gov. Gaston Caperton's chief of staff.

“[Local economic development] is where it all blooms,” Basile said. “This is where the opportunity blooms.”

Basile said he is eager to start his work with the organization that he feels creates economic and community opportunity. He will focus his early efforts on several downtown Charleston projects.

Basile replaces Patrick Bond as chairman, who served for four years.

As a managing member of the Spilman Thomas & Battle law firm, Basile focuses on economic development and government relations.

One of his favorite economic development memories is helping court Toyota to the Mountain State and trying to find enough flat land for the company.

Charleston Area Alliance President Matt Ballard said Basile brings a good mix of resources to the position.

“He loves to bring together parties to work together,” Ballard said. “He understands the government and the private side of it.”

It takes both private and public sectors working together to make economic projects a reality, Ballard said.

Basile believes Charleston can compete when attracting young professionals and new businesses. He also sees it as a place to foster innovation.

The area has strong legacy assets in energy, chemistry, health, leadership and workforce education, Basile said.

“We’re blessed to have great leadership on city and county level,” Basile said. “I’m amazed at how well folks work together here.”

Being in the capital city doesn’t hurt either – inevitably opportunities happen, he added.

“One of the greatest things about our state is it’s pretty easy to get to know everyone you need to know to make economic progress,” Basile said.

Basile believes the nature of economic development has changed in the last decade, though.

It’s now about courting the best and the brightest, he said.

A large part of that will be developing more downtown housing opportunities for young professionals, Basile said.

He constantly hears from young professionals they want to live within walking distance of where they work.

The organization is releasing its housing study conducted by Bowen National Research in May. The study explores expanding downtown housing opportunities, which is one of the first issues Basile hopes to address.

“We’re only seeing the beginning of that re-urbanization,” Basile said.

He believes downtown living options have improved in the last 20 years, but there need to be more options, he said.

Basile will focus on projects like revitalizing Slack Plaza in downtown and expanding the South Charleston technology park in addition to downtown housing.

“The alliance will always work to aggressively recruit new businesses to the region, but we also encourage our local innovators to take their ideas and technologies to the next level,” Basile said.

Both Basile and Ballard believe the organization has a promising future.

The alliance is increasing fundraising efforts — both locally and nationally, Basile said.

Basile believes in challenging the organization to think bigger and do more.

At his first executive committee meeting this week, Basile asked members what some of those large marquee projects they would like to develop.

Basile will also try to help maximize the potential economic benefit associated with natural gas shale exploration in the region.

“I can’t think of a better position or better match than the Alliance,” Basile said. “It’s a unified effort.”

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