

Salute_to_industry

Chasan Builds Upon Community Connections

 By Cameron Judd Staff Writer 05.20.17

When Ricky Shepherd talks about his work, one word repeatedly comes up.

Connections.

Shepherd, to whom in large measure fell the task of re-purposing a building that was foundational to the financial and family lives of thousands of Greene Countians for decades, has relied on connections to make it happen.

Marlin White, the still-new vice president of operations at the Chasan Industrial Complex in the former Magnavox Plant 3 building at 1915 Snapps Ferry Road, put it this way in a recent interview: "Every tenant here has a personal story that Ricky can tell you. I'm not kidding. Every tenant."

Ricky Shepherd, 55, is facilities manager at Chasan, which is headquartered in the huge facility that was home to Magnavox for years. Shepherd has worked at that building for nearly 40 years now, and knows it like an old friend.

He went to work in that building fresh out of West Greene High School while he was still in his teens.

Thousands of others in the Greene County area also know it well. At its height in the 1980s, more than 4,000 people held jobs there, putting out about 14,000 televisions a day, their cars filling the big parking lot end to end.

Shepherd was there during the peak years, and there during the decline that brought Greeneville's Magnavox era to an end.

In one way, though, that era has not ended. To this day, Shepherd said, he cannot visit some busy local place without being buttonholed by former Magnavox personnel who want to chat with him about the old days. He doesn't mind it, he said, but when he's pushed for time he'll sometimes slip in and out of a back door at Wal-Mart so he can keep moving.

Knowing that personal connection that so many locals have with the old Magnavox facilities is something that guided Shepherd's thinking when, post-Magnavox, he worked with industrialist Charles White to find a way to bring new life to the facilities, and to market them.

The building has gone through transitions of name and function since its peak years, but one thing, Shepherd said, has been constant: the lingering Magnavox identity.

"It didn't matter if the sign said Taylor-White, or Five Rivers, or North American Philips, or Philips, it was still the Magnavox building to people in East Tennessee," Shepherd said.

Today, the name on the sign says Chasan Industrial Complex, a name derived from combining the initial part of Charles White's first name with that of his wife, Sandra. It is pronounced like "chase-ann."

When he is talking about the complex to market it, Shepherd said, he almost always calls it "the Chasan Industrial Complex in the former Magnavox building," which identifies the location to anyone familiar with Greeneville.

After several years of trying to see the building used as a single-tenant facility, as it had been in the Magnavox period, White and Shepherd conferred and decided to turn it into a multi-tenant facility. It had proven too difficult to find and keep a single tenant in need of such a large complex. They reasoned that it might be more effective to lease out portions of the building to a variety of long-term tenants.

One of the best marketing tools Chasan has found so far, according to Marlin White, is a very old-school one: the sign out front.

Standing on a bank facing Snapps Ferry Road, the sign shows the Chasan name and lists current tenants.

White and Shepherd said they have been quite happy with the tenants they have, and have been willing to physically restructure parts of the interior to meet tenant needs.

Lease contracts are long-term.

"This isn't going to go away anytime in the next two or three or five years," Shepherd said.

Though Chasan LLC has only a handful of employees, the companies that lease space bring in about 500 workers a day to the historic old building and a few smaller Chasan businesses elsewhere in Greeneville.

The main Chasan building encompasses 1.1 million square feet of under-roof space. With the smaller outlying Chasan companies added in, the under-roof square footage rises to about 1.5 million.

"We've got 23 acres under roof right here," Shepherd said. That amount of leasable space compares closely to what is available at the Mt. Pleasant Industrial Park, he noted.

Word-of-mouth and networking has been the primary marketing tool, said Shepherd, who takes pleasure in seeing people involved in Chasan whom he has known almost all his life. Some of them are old WGHS classmates.

"The connections mean everything," he said. "Our growth is all about connections."

"It's been fun to see this place re-purposed from the TV business to what it is today. Manufacturing, offices, warehouses, logistics ... all of that happens here," Shepherd said. "People used to say this thing was just going to sit here and fall in and all that, so it's been pleasing to me to see all that has

happened.”

White is also happy with Chasan. When he was announced just weeks back as the new VP of operations, he said:

“Our team here is great and things run very smoothly. Since we are near capacity, a lot of what my time will be spent on will be looking for opportunities to growth and expanding the business.

“We have experienced incredible growth over the last three-plus years, and I’m very fortunate to be joining a company that is as strong, healthy and in such a growth position as Chasan is. I learned very quickly after coming on board that Chasan has a true ‘can-do’ attitude here when it comes to our customers, both existing and potential.”



Sun Photo by Cameron Judd

Though the parking lot outside the former Magnavox location is much more empty than it was during the heyday of the television manufacturer, hundreds come to work each day at the facility.