

# A GOOD NEWS DAY

The day began as most others. The remnants from putting out the Chattanooga Times Free Press the night before littered the floor and desktops in the newsroom. A handful of journalists and a couple of editors were in early to start another day.

But an anticipation was in the air.

The previous night, if only to be prepared, when the Times Free Press was shipped to engraving for plates that go on the press, 12 employees went to work on a special project, knowing that their effort might be for naught.

They assembled three pages of a four-page special edition of the Times Free Press on the hope that the following morning, July 15, Volkswagen would announce that its North American manufacturing facility was being sited in Chattanooga at Enterprise South.

The rumors for the past week pointed toward Limestone County in Alabama as the winner in a two-city competition.

An advance team from Volkswagen arrived here to be ready if the nod came to Tennessee and not Alabama.

Whether it was the singing of the Chattanooga Choo-Choo and the accompanying printed lyrics or the grading that leveled the Enterprise South site into a more workable location, the Volkswagen board of directors chose Chattanooga.

The Special Edition front page of the Chattanooga Times Free Press heralded the VW choice—It's Chattanooga!

The German automobile company was ready to re-enter the North American market, having been the first European automobile maker to test the waters across the Atlantic in 1979. The Pennsylvania experiment was shuttered in the mid 1980s, but today



Volkswagen, the fourth largest automaker in 2007, is poised to take on Toyota in the global market.

For Volkswagen, the U.S. market now is four percent of sales, and analysts say that "to take on Toyota, Volkswagen has to build serious sales muscle in the U.S.," according to a May 2007 Business Week article.

To build the muscle, Volkswagen is entering North America via a new \$1 billion manufacturing facility at Enterprise South, calling the local development "a critical element" in its North American strategy. The VW plan is to begin production in early 2011, eventually build 250,000 vehicles annually and hire 2,000 workers. The supplier network that will follow Volkswagen here will add upwards of 14,000 additional jobs.

No one knows for sure what tipped the Volkswagen edge to Chattanooga.

It may have been the local commitment to invest in the city long before a major manufacturer did the same.

It may have been the drive toward a sustainable community, improvement in schools, an available workforce or the natural beauty that surrounds the community.

It may have been the cooperation among the city, county, state and Chamber of Commerce to move forward with a united, focused economic front.

Whatever the reason, Chattanooga today celebrates Volkswagen's re-entry into the North American market and buckles in for a fast-paced ride over the next several years. **TFP**

—TOM GRISCOM

