



## CITY MANAGER'S UPDATE

MARCH 2014



CLINTON  
*South Carolina*

### LET'S HAVE A FEW MORE RIBBON CUTTINGS

I love groundbreaking and ribbon cuttings. To some people, I guess, these are tired, clichéd rituals that maybe have lost their purpose or potency. To me, though, groundbreaking and ribbon cuttings that celebrate the birth of a new business or a new enterprise remind us that our local economy is vital and strong. And if we're fortunate to have more ribbon cuttings than closings, well, we can all agree that's a very good thing for the City of Clinton.

But while we get excited about the openings of new retailers and service providers or the addition of a new industry, we often forget that a healthy local economy depends not only on adding new businesses but also on growing our existing economic base. We have many great businesses here in Clinton that provide customers plenty of opportunities to shop locally. I also believe there are people here who have thought about starting a business in their hometown but may not yet have the incentive or expertise to get their ideas off the ground.

We're all in luck. Thanks to our work with the Kauffmann Foundation in Kansas City, the City of Clinton will offer a 10-week FastTrac® GrowthVenture™ course for existing business leaders. Program participants will meet for three hours once a week over the 10-week period and will meet each time with a different expert in numerous fields. One week, for example, the class will meet an expert on financial management. The next week, it could be marketing. Or business law. More importantly, the course gives members of our business community the chance to ask questions and learn from leaders in their fields. They also can learn from one another successes they've experienced – or obstacles to avoid.

This is a golden opportunity for local business people. The FastTrac® program is a very successful, highly-recommended curriculum that we are very confident will yield tangible results. We feel that way because it has worked in countless communities across our nation.

Some of you may be skeptical. That's natural. But I believe very strongly that this tried and tested, fact-based program can provide a positive boost to the economy that will more than make up for the cost. Call it what it is – an investment in our economy that is relatively low risk and high reward.

I have no doubt there will be challenges that arise from this course. Business owners will be challenged to rethink their strategies and the different way today's customers search for and purchase products they want or need. They

may have to consider marketing their businesses for the first time – or providing products online. This much change all at once can seem a little scary at first but I believe this is the real strength of the FastTrac® program. Oftentimes when we consider a new path, the way seems dimly lit and the ground full of holes we cannot see. So, why not meet with experts who know firsthand the way to daylight?

We are fortunate, as well, to welcome Tom Ledbetter, a recognized leader in economic development and business growth in South Carolina. Tom will serve as the facilitator for Clinton's FastTrac® GrowthVenture™ course and we couldn't have a better leader. In addition to his own expertise, Tom knows a lot of people who can help our business community better understand the changing, global economy that affects even small towns like ours. He understands that no business can ever find a comfortable niche for itself and expect to keep the doors opened for the next decade or so. That's not our current economic reality and we all have to get used to doing things differently – or closing the doors for good.

We are also fortunate that we have a City Council in place that wants to see more opportunities for businesses to succeed and see our local economy grow. Our council understands the challenges faced by small businesses because many of them work with or own small businesses. Their desire to see our economy grow led to their commissioning of an economic development strategic plan and this partnership with the Kauffman Foundation.

I am confident that our business community will rise to the occasion, learn what it needs to be successful, and bring about an economic revolution. Sure, I'm an optimist – but I also believe in our ability to get things done and make things happen around here. All we need is a little guided boost – and we're about to get it. While this program is for current business owners, we haven't forgotten about those of you who dream of starting a business. If this first round is successful, we will bring other FastTrac programs designed to help you start a business from scratch to our community.

Then we can someday reap the benefits – and I may get to go to more ribbon cuttings.