

Work, Play, Live, and Learn in Middle **TENNESSEE**





Nestled in the hills of Marshall County, Tennessee, one hour south of Nashville and one hour north of Huntsville, lies Lewisburg, a place which can best be described as the quintessential middle Tennessee town.

Written by Samita Sarkar

Marshall County (population 32,000) has its county seat in Lewisburg, which sits about five miles from Interstate 65. The interstate runs from near Chicago, Illinois down to where it meets the Gulf of Mexico in Mobile, Alabama. Lewisburg has a population of 11,700, with a historic downtown and a quaint town square.

The community has shifted from farms to factories as the backbone of its economy. Between 2012 and 2015, Lewisburg's industrial and retail base announced more than 2,300 new jobs, and from 2013 to 2015 there was a 43 percent increase in the number of business licenses issued. Booming businesses, combined with a parks and recreation system that meets or exceeds national standards in almost every category, a public school system ranked exemplary by the state of Tennessee, and a cost of living 20 percent below the national average, makes Lewisburg (and Marshall County as a whole) an ideal location to work, play, live, and learn. ►►

► Come to work in a robust community

After the decline of Marshall County's once renowned pencil industry from cedar trees, the county was able to make a comeback through the automotive sector, and has maintained a strong manufacturing base ever since, with over 50 manufacturers currently operating in the area. Marshall County is conveniently situated in the Automotive Alley, the corridor between I-65 and I-75 that goes from the Great Lakes to the Gulf Coast. Not only is the county in the middle of Tennessee, but it is also in the middle of the I-65 corridor. There are 300 automotive OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) within a 300-mile radius of the City of Lewisburg. Marshall County is a day's drive to 76 percent of U.S. markets, and in close proximity to Nashville, TN; Franklin, TN; Murfreesboro, TN; and Huntsville, AL.

In addition to the automotive sector, Marshall County has opportunities in aerospace and defense, corrugated products, food and beverage manufacturing, tool and die, machining, healthcare, IT, and several types of engineering. "Since we are so primarily manufacturing-based, most of the discussion is about manufacturing careers, but we offer so much more than that. We run the gamut of careers here," explains Greg Lowe, Director of Economic Development at the City of Lewisburg.

With Lewisburg's venture into many different types of businesses within and beyond manufacturing, Greg Lowe and Mike

Wiles, Director of Marshall County Joint Economic and Community Development Board, also feel that the air is fresh for a startup—and they are ready to help.

"We help businesses and industries succeed any way we can. If that means going out and buying donuts in the morning, that's what we'll do. But generally we help find the money—the grants at the state or the federal level. Or we help them find the workers, the building, or the solutions to issues they are having. If you are thinking of starting a new business here in Marshall County, Mike and I are here to make sure you get all the help you need to be successful," says Lowe.

To meet the needs of new companies recruited into the county each year and keep their businesses competitive, Lowe and Wiles have been responsive to sustainability concerns. These not only include green practices and helping businesses through energy audits so they can lower energy costs, but also strategic planning and implementing programs to ensure a low tax burden. In 2015, Lewisburg was recognized as one of a few rural communities to achieve the gold level in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Valley Sustainable Communities program. "To achieve gold level as a rural community says a lot about how we view sustainability, and how it's linked into our planning and our processes moving forward," says Lowe.

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Play in Marshall County

For industry, Lewisburg is conveniently located in the Automotive Alley, yet there is another trail that also runs through the region: the scenic U.S. Bicycle Route 23. The route goes through Marshall County's Henry Horton State Park, which also hosts an annual 100-mile bike race called "the Horton 100."

To be sure, Lewisburg is a bike-friendly city with a high-ranking parks and recreation system according to national standards. The mayor is an avid bike rider who has a "Ride with the Mayor" event each year. Last year, Lewisburg hosted the Hell of the South cycling road race, which brought in about 250 bike riders from all over the world to come and race through its hills and valleys. Cyclists enjoy Lewisburg for its bike lanes and greenways.

Another draw is Lewisburg's Goats Music & More Festival, honoring Tennessee's famous Myotonic ("fainting") goats. The Festival attracts around 20,000 to 25,000 people a year from all 50 states and five countries. Attendees can observe the goats, experience a general carnival atmosphere, and also enjoy the arts, as the festival features live country music bands.

Marshall County provides residents with a fun, vibrant arts community of musicians, painters, sculptors,

and actors at the community theater level, while being close to larger urban areas. "We are an arts and outdoors community with affordability and accessibility," says Lowe. ►

"Marshall County provides residents with a fun, vibrant arts community."



► An idyllic place to live

Lewisburg was voted a Top 100 Micropolitan by Site Selection Magazine in 2013, and has only been improving since it received this designation. The following year, Lowe and Wiles attended a community improvement seminar that inspired them to create a 20-year vision plan. Someone at the seminar from Wyoming mentioned that she would bring groups of people with economic development backgrounds into the town, and Lewisburg fed and housed them for four days in exchange for a community assessment. They invited people to hold meetings with their realtors, high school students, and residents in finance, utilities, or government to ask basic questions about their community experiences.

“Six weeks later we got a report—the good, the bad, and the ugly. We took that report and said that we need to devise a plan based off of this, which is where the vision plan came from. We started putting together what we wanted our city to look like 20 years from now,” Lowe explains.

Impressively, Lewisburg has already accomplished about two-thirds of the plan in two years. This year is busy, as the team is re-evaluating and updating the vision plan and participating in the pilot phase of TVA's new Community Livability Program. The city has already completed over \$6.5 million dollars' worth of grant work on everything from bridges and airports, to greenways and the city's Rock Creek Park, at a cost of only \$600,000 to the city.

Lewisburg is a safe, carefully planned, family-oriented community where people don't always lock their doors. To maintain its high livability standards, codes require that new subdivisions must plant a certain number of trees. “The pretty maple trees and sycamore trees beautify the entrance to Lewisburg,” says Wiles.

On top of having a cost of living that is significantly below the national average, Lewisburg is an idyllic location for those who appreciate fresh air and greenery. It has been certified by the Arbor Day Foundation's Tree City USA program as a Tree City, with its green grass, rolling hills, and tree-lined streets.

Learning in Lewisburg

The Marshall County Public School System, ranked “exemplary” by the State of Tennessee, serves about 5,400 students from K-12 every year and graduates 90 percent, many of whom even earn multimillion-dollar scholarships.

For students in middle or high school, Lewisburg also has the Spot Lowe Technology Center. Located right between Lewisburg Middle School and Marshall County High School, Spot Lowe is part of the public school system, and offers courses in subjects such as machining, pre-engineering, robotics, 3D printing, automotive tech, cosmetology, and health sciences. This allows students to complete high school while learning a professional skill simultaneously. “The Spot Lowe Technology Center really prepares students for their postsecondary career path. We are very proud of that,” says Wiles.

For higher education, Marshall County is 30 minutes from Columbia State Community College and has a satellite campus in Lewisburg. The college offers programs in Advanced Integrated Industrial Technology and Emergency Medical Services. The Tennessee College of Applied Technology also has two locations near the county, and a satellite campus in downtown Lewisburg. Students can learn Industrial Maintenance, Automotive Technology, Practical Nursing, and CNC machining. Belmont University (a private liberal arts school in Nashville) and Middle Tennessee State University (a public university in Murfreesboro that offers 80 degree programs, along with graduate studies) are both an hour's commute from Lewisburg.

All of these facilities make Marshall County an attractive location for students, whether they are primary or high school students enjoying the exceptional public school system, or college students who choose to remain at home with family in the comforts of a highly livable, middle Tennessee town.

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Something for everyone

Marshall County is rural but modern, with the infrastructural development needed to be well-suited to businesses and desirable for working residents, students, and retirees. Marshall County and the City of Lewisburg's sharp focus on offering a high standard of living at a low cost of living attracts new companies from various sectors and new residents from many walks of life.

"If you are a single person who has a home-based business on your computer, we want you to live here. If you are a husband and wife raising a family, we want you to move here. And if you have already done all the work you plan on doing and you want to retire, we want you to make your life here," invites Lowe. ■



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