

NC A&T's homecoming draws alumni to Greensboro

'It's like a family reunion,' alumni official says of weeklong event

Fall brings cooler weather, football and a weeklong celebration at North Carolina A&T State University that draws thousands of alumni back to Greensboro.

There's the coronation of the homecoming royalty, multiple concerts for students, alumni and gospel lovers, tailgates, Aggie Fan Fest, and of course the big football game.

N.C. A&T, a longtime member of the Guilford Merchants Association, and alumni bill the weeklong extravaganza as "The Greatest Homecoming on Earth."

This year's homecoming kicks off with the coronation ceremony on Sunday, Oct. 29. The Aggies face off against Maryland's Towson University Tigers on Saturday, Nov. 4.

Events are still being announced.

"Each year, we celebrate the return of our alumni and look forward to this time to not only reminisce, reflect and build upon our North Carolina A&T experience but



Photos courtesy of N.C. A&T State University

Above: One of many floats goes past the crowd during the N.C. A&T Homecoming Parade last year. University officials say the weeklong homecoming celebration draws as many as 100,000 people to the area.

At right: Two people hug outside of Truist Stadium on N.C. A&T's campus at the homecoming game last year. "It has a huge impact on our campus. It is like a family reunion amplified and it has grown from one or two events to tons of events," said Crystal W. Boyce, interim associate vice chancellor for alumni relations.



also reconnect with our fellow Aggies and advocate for our alma mater," Chancellor Harold L. Martin said in his homecoming welcome message.

As many as 100,000 alumni, fans and friends come for

the weeklong celebration, according to Crystal W. Boyce, interim associate vice chancellor for alumni relations. But it's likely more than that, she said.

She said hotels around the city get sold out. Alumni also

shop and dine while in town.

The economic impact from homecoming has not been determined yet for the greater Greensboro community.

However, the university's impact to Guilford County is

about \$1.16 billion annually, according to a new report on fiscal year 2022 data by two A&T researchers.

Long tradition

Since 1926, N.C. A&T has celebrated homecoming every year. In 2020, university officials canceled the in-person celebration — the first cancellation recorded in history, said Boyce. It was turned into a virtual celebration due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following year marked another first — a hybrid homecoming with in-person and virtual events.

Homecoming has been "woven in the history of the institution," Boyce said.

Today, the university publishes a more than 30-page booklet with all of the events and activities for the week-long celebration. It takes a committee of 30 people from across the campus to put together homecoming.

"That's why it has grown to the Greatest Homecoming on Earth," she said. "It has a huge impact on our campus. It is like a family reunion amplified and it has grown from one or two events to tons of events."

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Trends is a publication of the Guilford Merchants Association.



And the winner is ...

Alison Huber calls out the winning ticket for one of several door prizes given out during the Aug. 15 After Work Network at the Nussbaum Center for Entrepreneurship in Greensboro. See more photos on page 5.



Name: Forrest Howard
Residence: Greensboro
Hometown: Youngsville
Age: 33
Education: Bachelor’s degree in elementary education, UNC Greensboro
Business: The Kimpton Cardinal Hotel, Winston-Salem
Role: Senior sales manager

Responsibilities: Hotel sales essentially works with groups needing 10 or more room nights, and possible events. My focus is on corporate and association groups, whereas my colleague works with sports, entertainment, universities, weddings, and more. I have other colleagues that work specifically with event-only groups as well. Our goal is to ensure that we have a steady stream of the business booking room blocks and events at our hotel. We are a boutique hotel in the heart of downtown Winston-Salem in the old R.J. Reynolds building. It’s a perfect location for off-site meetings, celebrations, and much more!

On GMA: GMA offers a good variety of events. Part of being a sales manager is networking,



and getting to know different people in a variety of businesses. GMA is a huge wealth of knowledge as far as who to connect with and everything and can certainly provide that insight if needed, or make that connection for me. They also have the ideal networking setup... the sticker game is sheer perfection!

On Risers: Risers provides a great way to connect with people that are similar, like minded, similar stages of life and career path, etc... Through Risers events, it’s easy to build camaraderie, a good networking system, and make some new friends while you’re at it.

Personal: My wife, Kathryn, and I are co-Chairs of the American Cancer Society Triad Board of Ambassadors, which is a new group focused towards raising awareness for the American Cancer Society and what they do, not only in the Triad, but for all individuals that are being affected. We’re always looking for people to potentially join the board or help volunteer and sponsorships for our new signature event that will debut in 2024. I also co-chair the Social Committee for synerG, another Greensboro young professional organization that focuses on networking, professional development, making connections in Greensboro, and more. If interested in either ACS or synerG, feel free to reach out!



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The Guilford Merchants Association is a nonprofit organization founded in 1906. The Association is a business membership organization focused on supporting member companies with educational programming, lead generation activities, marketing opportunities, and overall enrichment while serving as a catalyst for community growth and prosperity.

A night at the ballpark

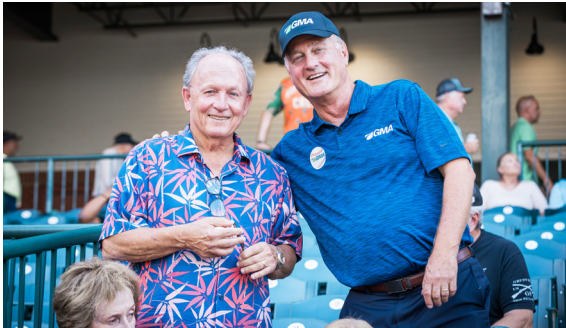


Photo top right: Donald Moore with the Greensboro Grasshoppers (left) poses with Richard Beard, president of the Greensboro Sports Foundation and 2023 GMA Chairman of the Board.

Above: Guilford Merchants Association members gathered on July 25 for a picnic before the Greensboro Grasshoppers game. The Hoppers beat the Winston-Salem Dash 13-2.



Above: Hilda and Don Allen with Alpine Graphic Apparel pose for a photo during the game.
At left: Sharon Smith (left), membership development, and Monzi Jimenez, special events coordinator, take a break from checking in GMA members and giving out fans to help everyone stay cool.

REMEMBER WHEN ... High Point lights up for Christmas



From the Guilford Merchants Association archives, this photo from 1965 shows downtown High Point decked out during the holiday season. The High Point Merchants Association (now GMA) has been in charge of the decorations and the parade since 1925.

AI-powered platforms can fill the gaps for small businesses

BY ADRIENNE CREGAR JANDLER

Heading into the fourth quarter of the year, many businesses are still struggling to do more with less.

From the challenges of staffing issues resulting from the Great Resignation and diminished productivity related to “silent quitting” to ongoing supply chain issues, and tighter budgets, it’s been a tough year.

The explosion of AI (artificial intelligence) and AI-powered applications has helped to bridge some of these and other challenges businesses face.

Here are four categories of AI-powered tools that small businesses are tapping into to achieve better business results, save money, and work smarter.

ChatGPT and Bard

Publicly released in November 2022, and available for free use, ChatGPT (chat.openai.com) can be used in a wide range of business applications, such as research, im-



Jandler

BUSINESS SUCCESS

proving decision-making, ideation, forecasting, personalizing marketing, and automating tasks, to name a few.

Google released its conversational AI product, Bard (bard.google.com), in March. Also free, Bard is trained on a later dataset and includes the ability to query the internet via live web search—a key differentiator from its chief competitor and predecessor.

While going directly to either ChatGPT or Bard provides direct querying opportunities, using them to full effect takes some time and effort to understand how the models work, how to prompt them, and what their limitations are.

AI-powered tools by use case

For use-specific applications, with expanded functionality and some guide rails to ensure better outcomes, a range of AI-powered tools are available. Cloud-based, and usually offered for a nominal subscription fee, these tools help companies harness AI’s power in very specific, targeted ways.

For example, Scribhow.com enables the auto-generation of step-by-step guides through the capture and documentation of on-screen activity. The created documentation can be used for a range of business purposes, such as documenting standard operating procedures, staff training, technical support references, customer education and more.

Airgram.io records, transcribes, summarizes, and shares meeting conversations. This note-taking tool also extracts key insights and action items and supports a number of languages.

There are hundreds of AI-powered applications; a few additional examples include:

- Synthesis.io to generate video content with text-to-speech and text-to-video capabilities.
- Leadiq.com for sales and prospecting.
- Jasper.ai for content creation.
- Leadsheets.co for sales copy creation and generation of script formulas.

Web browser extensions

Combining convenience with targeted functionality online are a whole slew of browser extensions, which en-

able use directly while doing regular daily work.

For example, Grammarly corrects your grammar in real-time for emails, documents, and even online conversations. SimplifyNote enables users to take notes from anywhere on the web, along with adding photos and important points.

AI-powered CRM platforms

The all-in-one Swiss Army knife of AI tools can be found in some of the leading customer relationship management platforms, which combine a more comprehensive set of AI-integrated tools that work together.

From marketing automation to social media content generation, chatbots, writing assistants, sales forecasting, prospecting tools, customer service task automation and more, CRM platforms like HubSpot and Salesforce provide an end-to-end platform.

Adrienne Cregar Jandler is president of Atlantic Webworks.

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Noontime Network gives GMA members a chance to have a little fun with an interactive networking game to help break the ice with new faces and a chance to win prizes. It is free to all employees of GMA member companies. Lunch is provided.



Above: Summer Wall, Next Level Construction, shows off the swag she won during the Noontime Network event on July 14 at the Hilton Garden Inn Airport in Greensboro. At right: Damien Booe (left), WXII 12, shows something on his phone to Andrew L. McNeal (right), Modern Woodmen Fraternal Financial.

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Photos courtesy of N.C. A&T State University

The football game is one of the key events for N.C. A&T's "Greatest Homecoming on Earth," in Greensboro.

Homecoming

Continued from page 1

Boyce said other universities ask her what is the "secret sauce" to getting such a big turnout for homecoming.

It's N.C. A&T, and the love alumni have for their alma mater, she said.

"When they graduate, that same passion and love is still there, that sense of Aggie Pride. It's just amplified after they leave," she said.

Recent additions

N.C. A&T in recent years added the Community and Economic Engagement Summit to its roster of homecoming events.

This will be the third year for the two-day summit, which includes a keynote speaker, panel discussions and breakout sessions.

In addition, the Office of Alumni Relations added a fitness component a few years ago, including boot camps for interested alumni.

In 2019, the university began hon-

oring young alumni donors with the "Top of the T" Donor Party.

In another change due to the pandemic, some class reunions have been moved to homecoming week. This year, graduating classes in years ending in threes or eights will celebrate their "Reunion @ Homecoming."

Boyce remembers her first homecoming as a student — the excitement in the residence hall and everyone dressing up in blue and gold.

As an alumna, it has been rewarding to reconnect and relive favorite memories with classmates during homecoming.

"It's the beauty of what it is to come home, to come back to a place that is so sacred to all of us and had such an impact," she said.

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Homecoming schedule

Every fall, Aggies come home for a week of events to celebrate what is known as The Greatest Homecoming on Earth. This year's homecoming week runs from Oct. 28 to Nov. 5.

Here's a look at key events. Find out more at <https://ncat.edu/homecoming>.

Coronation of Mister and Miss A&T: 5 p.m., Oct. 29, Corbett Sports Center on campus

Stepshow: 7 p.m., Nov. 3, Greensboro Coliseum, 1921 W. Gate City Blvd.

Alumni Homecoming Concert, 8:30 p.m., Nov. 3, Koury Convention Center

Parade: 8 a.m., Nov. 4. Starts on Lindsay Street.

Game against Towson University Tigers: 1 p.m., Nov. 4, Truist Stadium, 800 E. Lindsay St.

Homecoming Concert, 7:30 p.m., Nov. 4, Greensboro Coliseum

Aggie Homecoming Gospel Concert, 6 p.m., Nov. 5, Greensboro Coliseum



Networking through GMA leads to lots of opportunities

Longtime member says GMA's networking groups are a great way to make beneficial connections

John Passmore, a mortgage loan officer with Edge Home Finance Corp., joined Guilford Merchants Association in 2002.

"I was new to networking groups but I knew I had to get my name out there and meet people so I went and signed up," he said.

He belongs to GMA's "Networking Gurus" group, which meets on Mondays.

Over the years, he's met a lot of people through GMA. He started a database of all the people he's met, which he said has been very helpful. He often gets contacted by a potential client who was referred by someone he met through GMA.

While he now lives in Bermuda Run, which is just outside of Winston-Salem, he lived in the Greensboro area for many years.

"That's how I got started with GMA," he said. "So I still belong to GMA after all these years."

He wanted to network in the community for his job as a mortgage loan officer.

His job is more about educating people, Passmore said. Whether a first-time homebuyer or someone who has gone through the process before, it can be a daunting process, he said.

"The most important thing that I do is help people with their credit," he said. "I can spend hours with people over time explaining to them how to modify their credit report, how to improve your score. That is part of what I do, credit counseling."

The benefits of being able to network with so many people over the years have also helped him learn about other industries.

He's gone to many of the Noon-time Network and After Work

LOYAL MEMBER

"I knew I had to get my name out there and meet people."

— John Passmore

Network events. In such informal settings, you can meet people you might not have otherwise.

"No matter what, you learn something when you sit down and listen to somebody," he said.

In recent networking events, he's listened to people discuss the economy and other topics.

"If you want to meet people, which we do (as mortgage brokers) ... the most important thing is people have to know enough to make a phone call to you. And GMA provides that venue."

He's gone to some of the classes offered during his time with GMA, and thinks he might like to teach one at some point. The educational opportunities offered by GMA are great, especially for newer people in the marketplace, he said.

He also said organizations such as GMA are important for a community.

"Look at the information that's disseminated every week, every month, every year," he said. "It's huge. If you weren't in a networking group, you wouldn't know about half of this stuff."

GMA also offers a great way for people new to the area to learn about the community, he said.

For anyone looking to join GMA, Passmore says doing so will allow them to expand their horizons.

"If they want to grow as a person and if they want to grow their business, then they should join," he said.

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To join a networking group, call 336-378-6350

It's all about networking



Guilford Merchants Association members gathered at The Nussbaum Center For Entrepreneurship on Aug. 15 for the monthly Afterwork Network where they enjoyed drinks, appetizers and some fun. Pictured are: Carmen Falcone (front row center), Remarkable! A Speakers Bureau; Taji Vanhook, Allegacy Federal Credit Union; Gene Dolan, Culinary Visions; Shante Kirlaw, Transform Greensboro; and Peggy Hickie, Transform Greensboro.

**The Nussbaum Center
for Entrepreneurship**
Aug. 15, 2023



After hours networking gives members a chance to catch up with friends and make new ones. From left are: Luke Fisher, Christin Royal and Alexa McHale, all of Graham Personnel Services; and Tinker Clayton, Stitch FX.



Peter Graham (right), Alpha Omega Financial, passes out stickers and raffle tickets as Bill Howard, FirstPoint, looks on.



L'Vasia Holloway gives a waterless pedicure at her salon, Cure Waterless Nail Spa, at Revolution Mills in Greensboro. Photos by Traci Lester.

New spa features waterless pedicures, vegan and low-toxic products

Owner hopes her employees will also take advantage of GMA's benefits

Need a pedicure? How about one without any water?

That's L'Vasia Holloway's specialty.

Holloway's Cure Waterless Nail Spa started officially in 2021, but the new brick and mortar site at Revolution Mills opened June 6. It's one of many businesses in the sprawling complex of apartments, offices and retail.

Holloway, owner and founder of the spa, joined Guilford Merchants Association around the time she opened the Revolution Mills site. As she was getting the new salon ready, she met someone who told her about GMA and encouraged her to join.

She's been busy with the new salon, working from open to close every day since it opened.

She's looking forward to the educational sessions and the opportunities to network. She'd also like her employ-

NEW MEMBER

ees to benefit from what GMA offers.

Many of them also have their own businesses and brands, she said.

"I would definitely encourage them to get out there," she said.

Cure Waterless Nail Spa isn't her first venture. She had a business in Charlotte making and selling treats, but decided to switch to nail care. There were no part-time programs in Charlotte at the time, so she moved back to Greensboro.

She's originally from Burlington, but spent a few years at UNCG so Greensboro feels like home.

She's been doing nails for about five years.

About that waterless pedicure — the technique is growing in popularity but is still fairly new to the area, Holloway said. It's more common in larger metro areas like Washington, D.C., and New York City, she said.

She said it's a healthier option with more benefits. She also takes a low-toxic approach in her salon.

"The products that we use are either vegan, cruelty-free,

or low-toxic from harmful chemicals," she said.

That means no acrylics.

She's also a certified medical nail technician. She can provide advanced services, such as wellness pedicures and a non-invasive procedure for ingrown toenails.

"Being able to get a safe pedicure where they can still get polish and the full treatment, they really appreciate that," Holloway said. "So that's really what I'm trying to get people to understand when it comes to what we offer here."

She said once people try a waterless pedicure, they become believers.

"At first they're like, 'What? How does that work?' And then when they're done they're like, 'I don't even miss the water,'" she said.

"I feel like if anyone comes to visit the salon, the one service that they have to experience is definitely the waterless pedicure."

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Travel like a local in Austria and Greensboro with this guide

Austria native shares love and knowledge of her two homes with guided tours.

If you're in downtown Greensboro and see Marion Hofmann with a group of people having a picnic in the park or looking up at the buildings, most likely she's giving a tour.

Looking up is one thing locals forget to do, said Marion, whose Travel Like A Local business provides tours of Greensboro as well as her hometown of Graz, Austria.

Graz, Austria's second largest city, lies on the Mur River about 95 miles from Vienna, according to Britannica. The city is the capital of the Austrian state of Steiermark (or Styria), in southeast Austria.

It draws tourists, but not at the level of Vienna. Visitors can still see what everyday life is like in Austria there, she said.

She came up with the tour business idea after a trip home to visit family in 2019.

"I came back and I thought, 'You know what? It would be cool if people could visit my home and see where I'm from and what this has to offer,'" she said.

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"And it's not the Austria that people usually know. It's not Vienna; it's not Salzburg."

After that trip, she came up with the idea of "traveling like a local" — sharing the spots that only people who live in a city know.

She wanted to show off her other home too. Hofmann, who moved to the United States in 1995, first lived in Florida, then Rocky Mount, N.C., before settling in Greensboro in 2004.

"I probably know more about Greensboro than some people that have lived here their entire life just because it's different in your own city," she said. "You usually don't pay as much attention. ... You'll never see it because you live here and take it for granted."

The COVID-19 pandemic delayed her plans, because people just weren't traveling very much, she said.

She joined Guilford Merchants Association about a year ago. She has tried to go to as many events as she can.

"First of all, it's really fun to be there," she said. "The people are wonderful. ... It's just a great place to hang out."



Above: Marion Hofmann gives tours of Greensboro, where she has lived since 2004. Below: Hofmann poses in her hometown of Graz, Austria. She wanted to show visitors the hidden treasures of her two homes. She joined the Guilford Merchants Association about a year ago. "You meet so many neat people from so many different professions," she said.

So far, she hasn't met anybody that does what she does for a business, Hofmann said.

GMA membership has allowed her to get the word out about her tour business, but also to make friends.

"You meet so many neat people from so many different professions," she said.

She's met other GMA members who've helped her with her business, from web marketing through I Choose — I Am Not A Victim, to professional headshots through Angela Kerr Photography.

She said she's also learned



a lot through GMA's lunch and learn sessions and the monthly city briefing where city officials give updates and share information.

"I can just say it's really the best time spent," she said.

"It is a great, great investment."

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New members welcomed to GMA during August orientation

New members participated in orientation on Aug. 30.

Front row, from left: Michelle Bolick, GMA; Georgette Hamlett, The Carolina Theatre of Greensboro; Robert Klein, Triad Lanes; Barbara Beck, No Limits Triad; Donya Herring, BNI Momentum Chapter; Angelina Meeks, Guilford County Government; Debra Kieft, Guilford County Government; Natalie Mitchell, Southern Contracting Company Inc.

Back row, from left: Brett Ray, Powur; Heather Coble, Triad Lanes; Frank Reid, BUGOUT Pest Services; Hunter Amos, Tuggle Duggins P.A.; Larry Rudisill, BNI Momentum Chapter; Brennen Gilley, True Clean.



Balancing work, life and learning



Above left: Kristen Pellegrin with Dale Carnegie leads a discussion about work-life balance for Teach Me Tuesdays on Aug. 22.

Above right: Scott Elkins, M7 Technology Solutions and Jim Keen, New Garden Landscaping and Nursery, discuss balancing work and life.

At right: Participants were asked to talk to at least four other people to discuss ways to better balance work and life.



Above: Gerald Hutchinson, ActionCOACH, speaks about leadership to members of RIS-ERS, Guilford Merchants Association's young professionals group. The workshop was the group's first this year.

At left: Adrienne Jandler, Atlantic Webworks, talks about the opportunities AI (artificial intelligence) can offer in small business marketing.

Education sessions are also open to all employees of GMA member companies.



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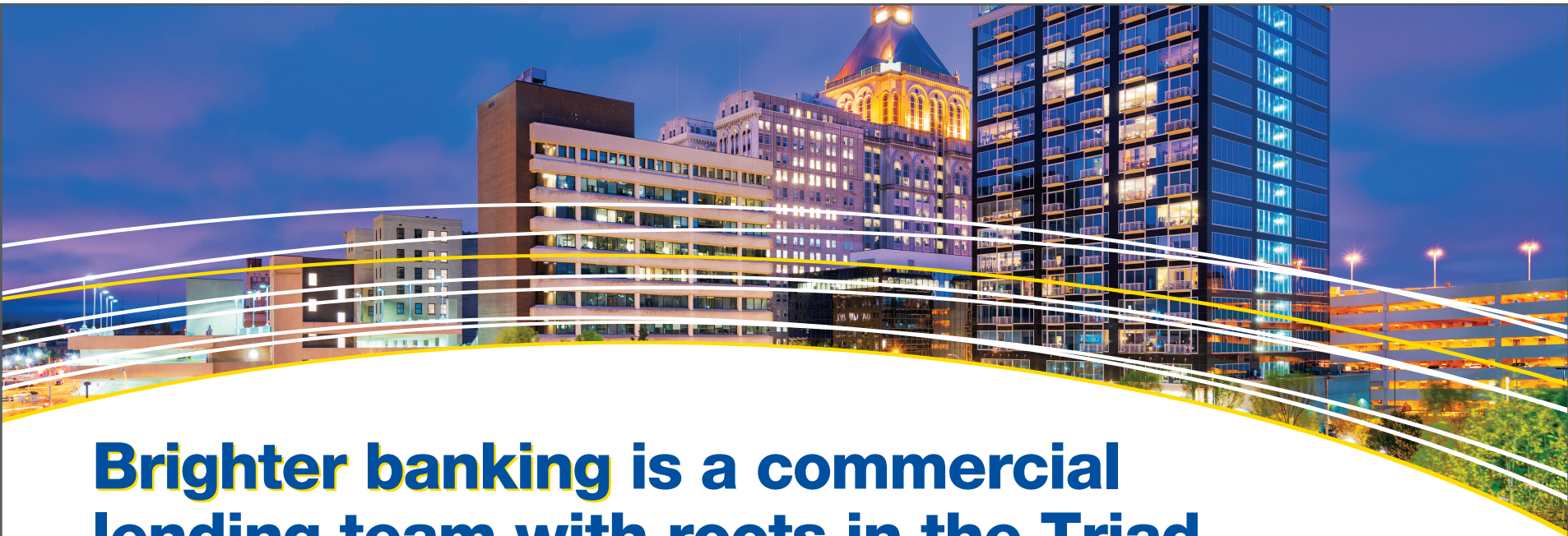

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