



Where has the Second Street Santa moved to?

This, plus letters to Santa, in our annual Holiday Greetings special section. Inside

THE CLARKSDALE

Press Register

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24 PAGES IN ONE SECTION CLARKSDALE, MS \$1

SILICON VALLEY COMPANY COMES ASHORE



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BANKS / THE CLARKSDALE PRESS REGISTER

There were plenty of smiling faces and applause as Clarksdale and Coahoma County leaders welcomed People Shores to Clarksdale during a ceremony held Tuesday morning at The Pinnacle on the Coahoma Community College campus. From left are Paul Pearson, president of the Coahoma County Board of Supervisors; Dinesh Chawla, president of the Clarksdale/Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce; Murali Vullaganti, CEO and founder of People Shores; and Clarksdale mayor Chuck Espy. **See more photos on Page 23.**

Party People

County celebrates the arrival of tech firm People Shores

Michael Banks
The Press Register

The leader of a company that has transformed the lives of 10,000 young adults living in rural India believes his American venture can produce similar results in Clarksdale and Coahoma County.

Murali Vullaganti, CEO and founder of the



Vullaganti, left, is shown with Jon Livingston, center, executive director of the Clarksdale/Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce, and David Moxam, co-founder of People Shores, at Tuesday's event.

business outsourcing company People Shores, was introduced Tuesday at The Pinnacle on the campus of Coahoma Community College.

"I believe in the talent here," Vullaganti said to an overflow crowd of business, government and educational leaders from the county and surrounding area.



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Mayor says he will not resign

Jonestown's top city official faces 5 felony charges

Josh Troy
The Press Register

Jonestown mayor Kenny Lester recently being arrested and charged with five counts of felony embezzlement leaves many questions to be answered, but one thing is for certain.

Lester, who previously stated he was unaware of any of the accusations prior to being arrested Dec. 9, said he does not plan to step down as mayor.

When asked if there was anything that could make Lester step down as mayor, he replied, "No comment."

The first indictment alleges that Lester, while serving as mayor, took \$331 that residents paid for water bills and water line repairs and converted it for his own use between July 2017 and August 2018. A separate indictment alleges that

SEE MAYOR ON PAGE 19



JOSH TROY / THE PRESS REGISTER

Jonestown mayor Kenny Lester says he will continue to do his job as he faces charges on five counts of felony embezzlement.



LOCAL NEWS

Murder suspect captured in Arkansas; charged in Eastgate Gardens killing.

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LOCAL NEWS

Former Clarksdale High School students return, offer guidance to current CHS students.

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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

People

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“We are looking for people who have the aspiration and the willingness to learn and do the best with what they have. With a lot of these people, we believe that if we train them and give them the right skills, we’re pretty confident that they will succeed,” he said.

People Shores is an offshoot of the company Rural Shores, which was formed in October 2008 with the objective to provide sustainable employment to 1 million rural youth by establishing Rural Shores centers in each of the 500 rural districts in India. Currently, there are 16 centers in eight Indian states.

The company’s vision is to transform rural youth into confident and caring knowledgeable professionals through impact sourcing.

Based in San Jose, Calif., People Shores provides image processing and data services for tech firms. For insurance companies, they provide lead generation, new policy support and premium postings, policy renewals and claim processing. In retail, they provide customer segmentation, campaign management, order processing, rebate and inventory tracking. They provide services for travel and banking industries.

People Shores will be locating in Clarksdale in January with plans to train and hire 20 employees. And it is Vullaganti’s goal to eventually to grow that number 10-fold over the next 24 months.

“We are hoping that it can be sooner than that, but we don’t want to set the wrong expectations,” said Vullaganti, who added that People Shores is currently in discussion with several large global corporations for work for the Clarksdale center.

“They want us to set up the center first and get the first people trained,” Vullaganti said as he envisions training to start in January at People Shores’ new location at 1540 Desoto Ave., which is currently the home of the Clarksdale/Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce.

The site will allow for 200 workers, but Vullaganti said, “We are hoping that it will not stop at 200.”

The company will offer a “living wage” comparable to this area, Vullaganti said, with benefits.

Clarksdale becomes the second



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BANKS / THE CLARKSDALE PRESS REGISTER

Murali Vullaganti, left, the CEO and founder of People Shores, looks on as David Moxam, a founding director of People Shores, shares a story with the crowd at Tuesday’s announcement of People Shores coming to Clarksdale. Of Vullaganti, Moxam said he’s a ‘skilled, caring man that likes to help underserved communities.’

People Shores center in the United States and is its first rural center. Its first location in San Jose, Calif., opened about a year ago.

“We believe in people. We believe in their aspirations. All that they need is an opportunity,” Vullaganti said.

Because of the commitment and dedication shown by his employees, Vullaganti believes his company’s clients benefit because “the quality of work done for our clients is much, much superior,” even exceeding the work done by Silicon Valley giants such as Google.

David Moxam, a founding director of People Shores, said it is their hope to teach technical skills to young adults ages 18 to 26 and create long-term careers for their employees. He said it is their goal to have “a sustainable impact” in those communities in which they locate.

“We create tech careers and we try to create employment,” said Moxam, who noted the first nine to 12 months of starting a center are usually the most challenging and critical.

“There’s going to be bumps in the road and there’s going to be times when it feels like it’s not going to work. It’s going to be hard. But that’s Ok,” Moxam said.



Paul Pearson, left, president of the Coahoma County Board of Supervisors, and Clarksdale mayor Chuck Espy are shown during Tuesday’s program at Coahoma Community College welcoming People Shores to the city and county. Espy commended the city and county governments for working together on the People Shores project to make it happen and bring jobs to this county.

“It’s a turning point and we’re going forward from here. We know how to get these things done.”

He said while current numbers show 4,000 employees working for People Shores and Rural

Shores, the number of people trained by Vullaganti actually exceeds 10,000.

“That’s a lot of jobs and careers. That’s a lot of employment,” Moxam said of Vullaganti. “That’s not just passion. That’s a

skilled, caring man that likes to help underserved communities.”

He said they look forward to being active participants in the local community.

“This is a beautiful area to create technology careers for young adults,” Moxam said. “Young adults can come here and have a tremendous quality of life.”

And it comes to an area that is needing a boost, said Jon Levingston, who is the executive director of the Clarksdale/Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce and headed up the efforts to bring People Shores here.

“For so many years, there have those who have said the best days of the Delta are behind it. The future is bleak, crime is up and we’re depopulating. Our opportunities, educationally and financially, are diminishing,” Levingston said.

“But I say to those people, today, we turn the tide.”

Clarksdale mayor Chuck Espy compared Clarksdale’s struggle to right itself economically similar to one learning how to ride a bike.

“When you first started out, you couldn’t do it. You wobbled. You were insecure and you failed several times. But all of a sudden, you began to find that rhythm and, the next thing you know, your mother or father pushed you, and you were off,” Espy said. “That’s where Clarksdale is right now. We’re off. We’re off to the races.”

He commended the city and county working together on the People Shores project to make it happen.

Paul Pearson, president of the Coahoma County Board of Supervisors, said he believes People Shores “has exactly what Coahoma County needs to move forward.”

“This is going to be a great asset to everybody concerned,” he said.

And it’s important for Clarksdale and Coahoma County to support the center, Vullaganti said.

“Without the community’s participation and having a sense of ownership, the success will be difficult,” he said. “The Clarksdale center belongs to all of you. To all of us. The success of the center is on the shoulders of all of us.”

“We will work together to make this center hugely successful and build this as a model center for the rural communities within the U.S.”



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