

## People Shores



# How did People Shores land in Clarksdale?

September 2017

Abhishek Goel, founder and CEO of the tech firm Dasceq in Dallas, visits the People Shores location in San Jose, Calif., and meets with the leadership team out there as they make plans to open the first center in the United States.

Goel is impressed by what he sees and shares his thoughts with his good friend, Parveen Chawla, who is the wife of **Dinesh Chawla**, CEO of the Chawla Hotel Group, which owns 18 hotels in the Delta, including three in Clarksdale.

#### January 2018

Dinesh Chawla posts a message on his personal Facebook page on Jan. 20. It reads:

"Headed to California again. This time Silicon Valley. I'm shooting for the stars on this one. I hope to bring a project to the Delta that could provide hundreds of high-paying jobs to our area. Sounds like wistful dreaming. But I don't want to sell our area short. Remember that we convinced a big-time family and hotel company that we could put a luxury hotel in a 17-acre sorghum field. I'm hoping lightning strikes twice. Good people live in Mississippi and we are very humbled to have this opportunity to pitch and develop."

Jon Levingston, executive director of the Clarksdale/Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce, remembers reading the post one night just as he was getting into bed.

"I just thought he was full of hot air," Levingston said. "I just chuckled

to myself. The absurdity of a Silicon Valley-based company locating in the Mississippi Delta. I just rolled over, went to sleep and forgot about it."

On Jan. 23, Chawla follows up with another post that reads, "Great trip to Silicon Valley. Got to make a presentation to a technology group that definitely wants to come to Mississippi and develop a 200- to 300-person high-tech workforce over the next two years. Big names and money are associated with this project. Kudos to Parveen Chawla for connecting everyone and pushing this. (I'm the wingman)."

#### March 2018

At an invite from Clarksdale businessman Dudley Barnes and his wife, Claire, Levingston and his wife, Jennifer, are attending a show at the Bologna Performing Arts Center on the Delta State University campus in

Levingston sees his friend, Dinesh Chawla, and says, "Just out of conversation, tell me about this Silicon Valley company that you think has an interest in Mississippi."

He said Chawla expressed his seriousness about the prospect and relayed the possibility of creating 200

That immediately piqued his interest and he asked Chawla what he needed to make it happen. His reply? A building.

"And I said, 'I can get you a building," said Levingston, who invites Chawla to Clarksdale to look at prospective buildings and a three-

hour lunch. At the end of the visit, Chawla invites Levingston to visit California in May and he will introduce him to People Shores execu-

### May 2018

Levingston attends the grand opening for the People Shores location in San Jose, Calif., and for two days his schedule is full of meetings with People Shores investors and employees.

"It was one of the most intense trips I've ever had," said Levingston, who was asked to speak at the grand opening ceremony by Murali Vullaganti, the founder and CEO of PeopleShores.

Levingston's speech is recorded and placed on YouTube, where it is viewed by David Aune, a native of Water Valley and graduate of the University of Mississippi School of Engineering. Aune, who now makes his home in Santa Clara, Calif., had spent his career at Apple and Hewlett-Packard before retiring and starting volunteer work for People Shores.

It turns out Aune's brother, Chris, and Levingston's wife, Jennifer, who is also from Water Valley, were best friends in high school and she had recently seen David at his father's

"What a small world," says Levingston, who begins his "due diligence" and starts work on the possibility of bringing People Shores to Coahoma County.

At the invitation of People Shores executives, Levingston returns to Silicon Valley to attend a conference at Stanford University that focuses on rural health care. But he spends a majority of his time with People Shores executives and tells them of what Clarksdale and Coahoma County could offer their company.

As a result of his visit, Vullaganti and David Moxam, another founder of People Shores, schedules a visit to Clarksdale. It will be the first of several trips the two will make to this area. Levingston arranges meetings with different corporate groups, including C-Spire.

#### **July 2018**

During another visit to Clarksdale, Vullaganti and Moxam meet with corporate leaders, as well as with universities in the surrounding area. A reception is held at the Yazoo Pass where Clarksdale and Coahoma County public officials have the chance to meet with Vullaganti and Moxam and learn more about People Shores. The duo also meet with local business leaders, as well as industrial foundation and economic development authority board members.

#### Fall 2018

Vullaganti and Moxam, as well as other members of the People Shores leadership team, make visits to Clarksdale to meet with local, regional and state officials, including Gov. Phil Bryant.

"They've been here, off and on,

throughout the fall," Levingston said. In November, the Coahoma County Board of Supervisors approve a lease on the building that currently houses the Clarksdale/Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce. The county agrees to lease the building to the local Economic Development Authority, who will then sublet the building to People Shores. The lease is for 10 years.

#### Late November and early December 2018

Levingston makes a visit to India to see the Rural Shores operation in action. The company employs 2,500 people in 17 centers in 10 states in India, delivering over 45 processes to more than 30 clients.

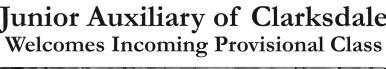
"The amount of impact they had on the communities in which they located a center was so great and so positive that it reaffirmed the value of bringing them to Clarksdale," Levingston said. "It really reenergized me in my commitment to doing whatever I could possibly do to help them succeed in our community."

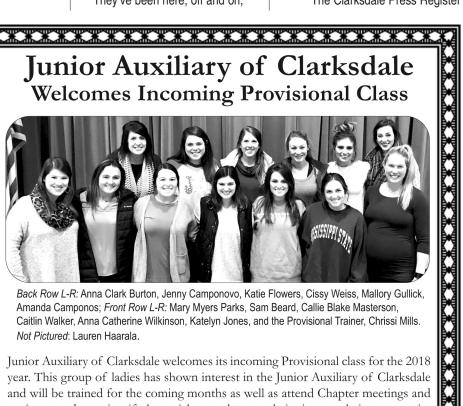
On Tuesday, Dec. 18, the announcement is made that People Shores will be locating in Clarksdale.

The sublet on People Shores' Clarksdale location begins Jan. 1. They are expected to begin hiring and training in January and February with the center fully operational in March.

> -- Compiled by Michael Banks / The Clarksdale Press Register







and will be trained for the coming months as well as attend Chapter meetings and projects to determine if they wish to volunteer their time to their community through this organization for the next five years.

Junior Auxiliary of Clarksdale is a national non-profit organization that encourages members to render charitable services, which are beneficial to the general public, with particular emphasis on children.

Junior Auxiliary of Clarksdale was chartered by a group of caring, enthusiastic women in 1971 and continues to grow and thrive throughout Quitman and Coahoma Counties. Volunteers work tirelessly throughout the year on a variety of projects that focus on local children and families in need of assistance.

Junior Auxiliary is a part of the National Association of Junior Auxiliaries (NAJA), a non-profit organization founded in 1941 with headquarters in Greenville. NAJA has more than 13,500 active, associate, and life members in 101 chapters in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee and Texas.

The NAJA slogan is "Care Today - Character Tomorrow" and when teamed with the current focus of the Association, Junior Auxiliary Chapters are working more than ever before to increase awareness of child health and welfare and how it affects their futures.

For more information on Junior Auxiliary of Clarksdale, visit us on social media at https://m.facebook.com/jaofclarksdalems/ and for more information on NAJA, visit www.najanet.org