

THE DEAN'S VIEW

Dear *Tennessee's Business* readers:

Momma always has good advice, and we would all do well to listen carefully, but we'll get back to that.

This special edition of the magazine focuses on the music business in middle Tennessee. Being from around "Music City, U.S.A." has its rewards. Having traveled abroad just a little, I have firsthand empirical evidence that this title has given the region a worldwide reputation. It is how we are known, and it serves us well. The music industry has been good for the region, and the relationship is symbiotic.

Success seems to breed success. Perhaps 20,000 regional residents make their living in the music industry in one form or another—music, tourism, broadcasting—in turn enhancing the employment of many others. The successes of early companies encouraged other companies to spin off and grow to the point that approximately 1,500 entertainment companies currently make the region home.

The industry has found fertile ground. Universities in the region have responded to the needs of the industry. Music business related programs in the College of Mass Communication at MTSU and at Belmont University are unique to the area and renowned throughout the country. Great music programs at these and other regional universities are a constant source of talent for the burgeoning industry. Peripheral talent necessary for the business abounds in the region; accountants, banks, and lawyers specializing in the intricacies and needs of the music business work together to continue to foster its growth.

The region is centrally located for distribution purposes. It has reasonable salary and wage rates; a supportive publishing industry, itself a major asset of the region; and, at its base, a tremendous pool of creative talent including perhaps thousands of successful and would-be songwriters, both country and gospel.

The Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce compiles data on the significance of the music industry to the region—and significant it is. In *Entertainment and Music*, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce provides the following information of interest:

- The city's country record business quadrupled between 1990 and 1995, with annual sales increasing from roughly \$500 million to more than \$2 billion. By 1998, Nashville's show business volume exceeded \$3.5 billion.

- Since 1996, the Christian music genre has grown by almost 75 percent, outselling jazz and classical music together nationwide and approaching \$1 billion in revenues.
- In 1998-99 alone, a dozen new labels emerged in Music City.

There are many mutually beneficial businesses here. Approximately 225 viable song-publishing companies in Nashville have extremely good links to all of those creative writers mentioned earlier.

The music heritage of the region is not new. The history of the music business in the region is grounded in gospel. Several current icons date back from 75 to 100-plus years. The Jubilee Singers of Fisk University are world famous. The Benson Company was founded in 1902. The Grand Ole Opry and WSM radio have continued to operate since 1925.

The business is not history bound. New parts of the business continue to emerge in the region. Services necessary to the success of the music industry abound. Public relations, lighting, management, tape manufacturing, printing, road management, and video production companies find the region a profitable place to locate.

While the relationship thrives, it is not without some problems. The country music image carries negative connotations in certain circles. Some view Nashville's music—country, bluegrass, gospel—as unsophisticated, even "hayseed." Some might say the music business excessively dominates the local economy and that, within the industry, there is unwillingness to expand beyond the country and gospel genres.

Critics are always with us. There is an old saying, "Virtue taken to excess becomes a vice." Perhaps the music industry is a little dominant. Perhaps parts of the country, even world, see the region as a bit hayseed.

When I got ready to go to my first dance, Momma gave me this advice, "Be sure you dance with the one you go with." This region has been going pretty well with the music industry for a long time. I, for one, think we need to be sure to do what Momma said and continue to dance.

Sincerely, 

*E. James Burton, Dean
Jennings A. Jones College of Business
Middle Tennessee State University*

by **E. James Burton**



Music business related programs at MTSU and Belmont University are unique to the area and nationally renowned.