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Cross City Lumber celebrates success



Dixie County Manager Tim Alexander tells everyone that he is thankful that God has blessed Dixie County with the restart of this lumbermill.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © May 25, 2019 at 2:09 p.m.

CROSS CITY – Cross City Lumber held a grand opening on Wednesday afternoon (May 22) to celebrate its success.

For about an hour and a half, hundreds of people sat in 90-degree weather in the shade of a giant metal pole barn (lumber shed) used for lumber storage. The program ended with lunch served buffet style.

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Tables and tables of food were available for the lunch.



Tables and tables of desserts added to the many things guests were invited to enjoy at the lumbermill party.

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Lisa Conner, donning an ultra-stylish hat, welcomes everyone to the lumbermill party. She encouraged everyone to show nothing but love at the event. Lisa Conner, the wife of lumbermill owner Steve Conner, served as the emcee. This sawmill, the former Georgia-Pacific mill that had been closed for many years, now employs 90 full-time workers in Dixie County.

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Dotti Leichner is seen in the foreground with her camera, as in the background Kerry Gordon, Goose Goodrich, Thomas Jay Duncan and Bob Leichner provide musical entertainment.



This is a view of looking at the people as they look up at the stage where people accepted plaques and people gave speeches.

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This photo of the mass of employees (mostly in glow green shirts) at the front of the lumber shed results from Cross City Lumber President Wes Grant providing the press with a request to be prepared to take the big shot. Grant assured the employees were recognized.

The event included entertainment by Kerry Gordon on lead guitar and vocals, with Goose Goodrich and Thomas Jay Duncan also on guitars and Bob Leichner on drums. Dotti Leichner provided some of the sound system work, although Bob took the lead on that.

Lisa Conner opened the event with a loud and happy greeting and announcement to start the “sawmill party.”

The former teacher was very lively throughout the program.

Cross City Lumber President Wes Grant led people in the Pledge of Allegiance. Later, before the meal, Pastor Joe Brooks gave the blessing.

Dixie County Manager Tim Alexander, who is also the chairman of the Dixie County School Board, was the first to speak about the history of the sawmill and its success now.

Alexander expressed his gratitude to the Dixie County Chamber of Commerce, Dixie County Board of County Commissioners, the staff of the Dixie County Manager’s Office, the local economic development council, and to all other interests to help bring this sawmill back into active use.

About two years ago, Alexander came out to the site and not with Steve Conner and learned about Connor’s plan to restart the mill.

Alexander contacted Jeff Hendry, executive director of the North Florida Economic Development Partnership, to begin finding methods to assist Conner in his plan. The lumbermill was in a target industry that qualified for credits to aid in its refurbishing.

Conner told Alexander that he was not interested in getting anything free, however if there was a method to get low interest loan, then he would like to learn about that, Alexander said. Diane Scholz, director of Rural Economic Development Services for the

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North Florida Economic Development Partnership discovered a program that had not been used in some time, Alexander said.

The Rural Community Development Revolving Loan program was tapped to help in this regard, Alexander said. Staff members at the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity helped the \$1.5 million loan come to fruition, so that Cross City Lumber could obtain a vital piece of equipment, Alexander said.

Ever since the mill closed about 10 years ago, Alexander said, everyone has wanted to see it reopen to provide jobs in the community.

Alexander said he is proud of the Dixie County Board Of County Commissioners for stepping up to the plate and signing a 30-year commitment so that the mill could obtain the loan.

“I am proud to stand here today,” he continued, “and to say in 18 months that loan was paid off.”

Several other speakers helped everyone understand that here was a multitude of people and agencies that brought the sawmill back to life.

Congressman Neil Dunn’s Chief of Staff Will Kendrick shared some brief comments to congratulate the business owners on their success, and the 20-year Florida Legislature veteran spoke well of Dixie County.

Cross City Lumber Owner Steve Conner, President Wes Grant and CEO Mike Tate recognized many of the contributors who helped the sawmill restart and who are keeping it going as a sustainable economic engine in this region of Florida.

There were many promotional items given away as well as people having the opportunity to enjoy a lunch there.



Cross City Lumber President Wes Grant prepares to speak.

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Cross City Lumber owner Steve Conner listens as his wife Lisa Conner serves as emcee.



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Steve Conner (at left) looks on as Daniel Dickert (center) presents Dixie County Commissioner Mark Hatch with a plaque for Hatch's part in bringing the sawmill back to life.



Daniel Dickert presents a plaque to attorney Daniel L. Studstill of Valdosta, Georgia, for his work.

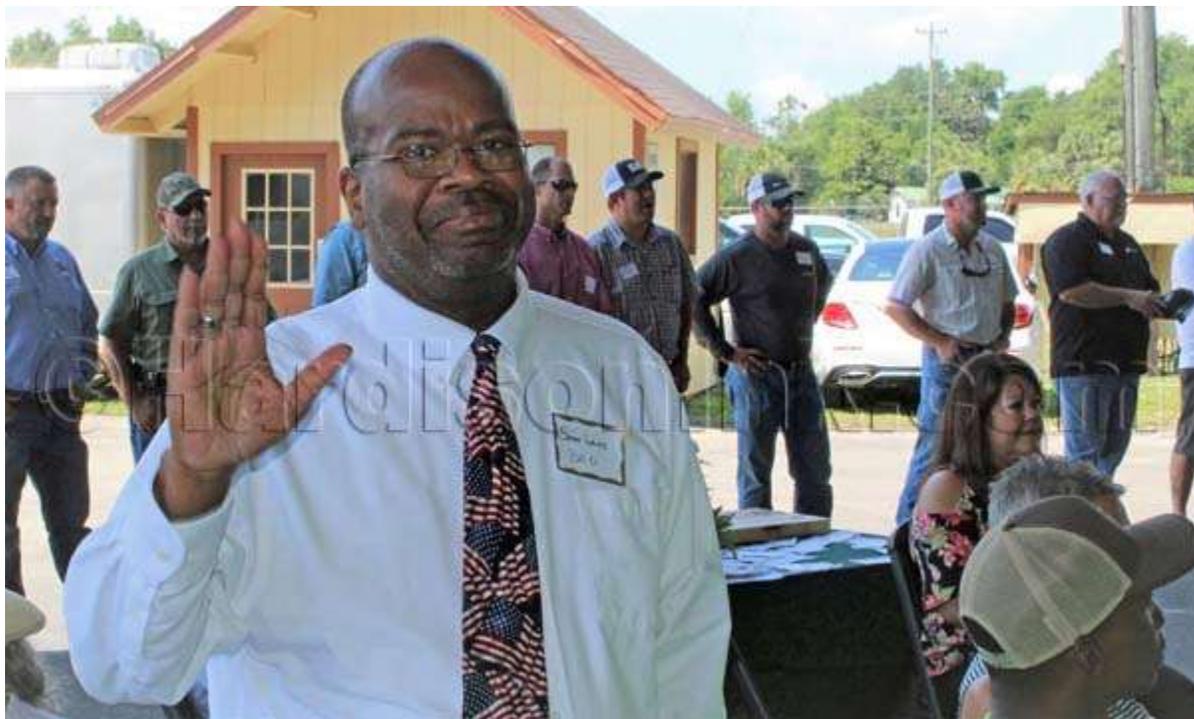


Daniel Dickert presents a plaque to Glen Osteen who was accepting on behalf of John Sherrill, who was unable to attend the event.

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Jeff Hendry, executive director of the North Florida Economic Development Partnership, tell the audience about how the Cross City Lumber beat the odds and succeeded.



Sam Lewis of the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity is among the many people who are recognized as helping lumbermill come to be.

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Dixie County Chamber Of Commerce President Carol West (center of photo) is among the primary movers and shakers who assisted Tim Alexander in finding help from the North Florida Economic Development Partnership.



Frank Durabi is an environmental engineer and an avid University of Florida Gator (Go Gators!) promoter who shared information in a

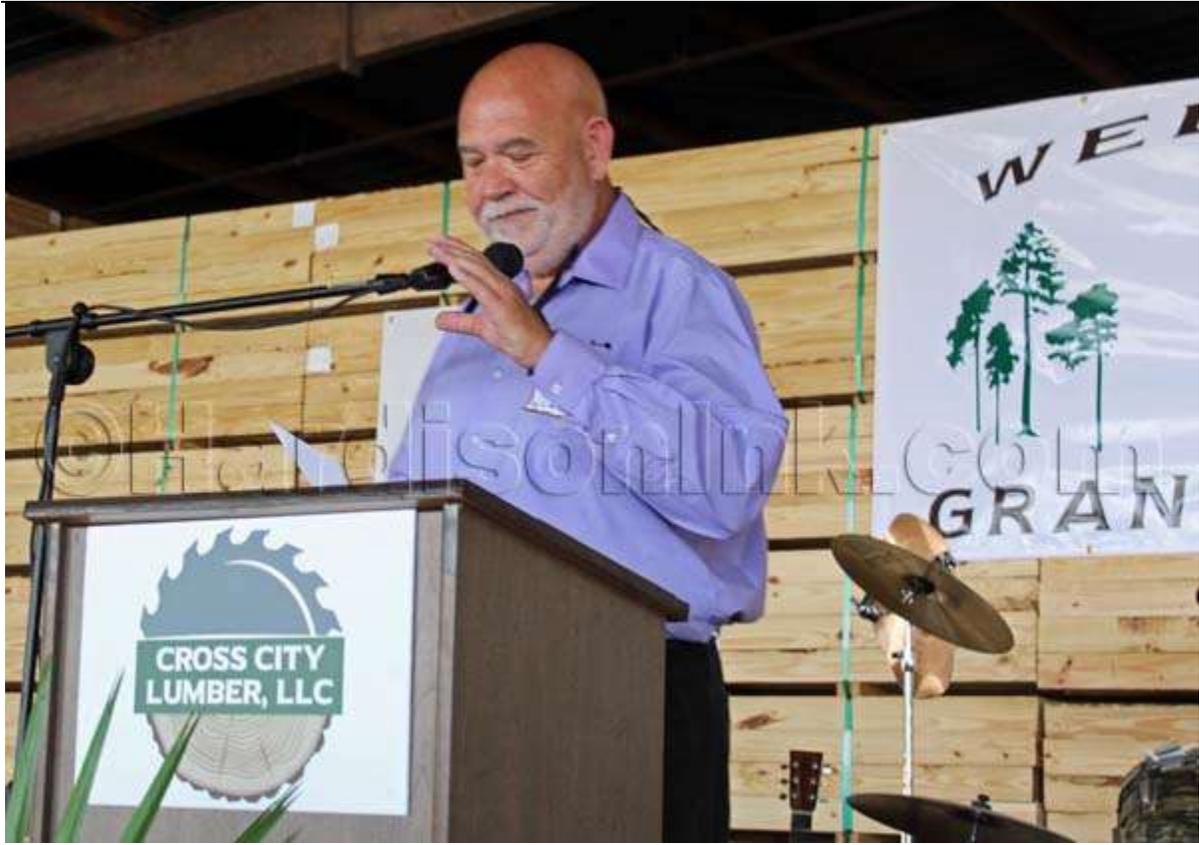
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lighthearted way regarding his part in helping the sawmill come back to life.



Andy Chesser speaks about the sawmill as Lisa Gorden watches.

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Will Kendrick, chief of staff to Congressman Neal Dunn (R-Florida, Dist. 2), prepares to share his positive comments about the new sawmill.

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Lynetta and Ken Griner of Usher Land and Timber are among the many, many tree providers. The long lists of people and companies who helped the sawmill restart and to continue is like a small telephone directory.



The ribbon is cut. Actually, at this ribbon-cutting event, the ribbon was never cut but there was the posing as if it was to be snipped. And then, there was lunch, dessert and entertainment. A good time was had by all.