

**BUSINESS
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A man with a goatee, wearing an orange hard hat with a white 'S' logo and a blue and orange safety vest, is smiling and holding a shovel. The background is a blurred construction site with an American flag visible.

**IT'S ALL ABOUT
THE PEOPLE**

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Undergoing numerous mergers, name changes, and expansions throughout the state, the company known as Spire since 2017 has served the state of Alabama for over 170 years. Spire is a natural gas utility company providing services to nearly 520,000 customers statewide and employing nearly 1,100 people across Alabama.

As our state continues to recruit and attract companies to locate here, Spire has proactively enhanced their economic development initiatives to support our state's growth. Natural gas is essential to many industries and their operations, and Spire works to prepare Alabama's natural gas infrastructure to ensure we are a sound and competitive option in a company's location selection.

In conjunction with their essential work to provide natural gas to over half a million Alabamians, Spire strives to represent and be fully integrated into the communities they serve, as well. To do that, Spire has prioritized people through workforce and economic development programs and community service

initiatives across the state.

This focus on people is what keeps life-long employees like Joe Hampton coming back. Hampton began his career with the company as an 18-year-old intern, and now serves as president of Spire's Alabama and Mississippi utilities. When asked about the root of his

leave a place where everyone trusts and believes in this shared mission."

URBAN ENERGY JOBS PROGRAM

One of Spire's most recent workforce development programs is in partnership with Alabama Power and the Birmingham Urban League on a regional pre-apprenticeship ini-

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longevity and passion for Spire, he shares, "It's all about the people. The culture, the family-feel, and the commitment of this company to improve the lives and communities we're in is unmatched. It's hard to

tiative as part of the Urban Energy Jobs Program, a joint effort between the National Urban League (NUL) and the Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD). The goal is to train individuals and provide the educational tools and resources to create every



JOE HAMPTON, PRESIDENT OF ALABAMA AND MISSISSIPPI UTILITIES

avenue possible for young people to enter the energy industry and get excited about their potential.

Through this partnership, Spire is working to expand and diversify Birmingham's workforce, starting with a six-session program this fall that offers certifications in construction, skilled trades, customer service and career readiness. As a partner in this initiative with the Urban League, Spire is laying the foundation to ensure their future workforce will become leaders who reflect and represent the many communities they serve.

"We want to be more than a company that people just pay their bills to," says President Joe Hampton. "When customers get that envelope in the mail or see a Spire truck driving by their house, we want people to think 'Hey, my neighbor works there!' or 'My daughter works for Spire.' This goal is why we're investing in the next generation of leaders as we tap into the talent in our state and establish workforce development programs like this one with the Urban League."



POULTRY FARM IN RANBURNE, AL

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Realizing a gap of service in some of Alabama's most rural areas, Spire created the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) to bring affordable, reliable, and abundant natural gas to poultry farmers and residents in eastern, rural Alabama. For years, many rural Alabama farmers have relied on propane to maintain the proper temperature in their chicken houses. While effective, the inconsistent cost and availability of propane have been major concerns. The cost and reliability of natural gas makes it a much better option for them and their business, but the infrastructure is lacking in certain places. By working closely with the Alabama Public Service Commission to allocate funds to this community and serve these rural customers, Spire has brought the reliability of natural gas to 50 poultry houses in Alabama so far.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM: HOPEWELL CROSSINGS

Spire has also teamed up with Habitat for Humanity Greater Birmingham by providing a grant towards the cost of a new home construction project in the Hopewell Crossings community of Bessemer, Alabama. Hopewell Crossings is a 34-acre,

mixed-income housing development that is expected to be completed in 2026. This initiative will offer 125 new, single-family houses ranging in size and sale price. Approximately half of the new homes will be built by Habitat Birmingham and community volunteers. Many volunteers from Spire came together and used their energy to build a home, which was presented to the new homeowner in April 2023. All 125 new homes in the development will use natural gas for their cooking and heating needs.

JONES VALLEY TEACHING FARM

Spire believes in and supports the mission of Jones Valley Teaching Farm (JVTF) in Birmingham - using food as a foundation so that young people, specifically in urban areas, can lead, create, and grow a healthy future for themselves and their community. Spire employees volunteer at the farm during the company's "Day for Good" and throughout the year. Additionally, Spire was a major supporter of JVTF's Ready to Grow capital campaign, which brought the Center for Food Education to life. The Center



EXCEPTIONAL ANGLERS PROGRAM

for Food Education is a gathering and learning space that connects people through growing, cooking and sharing food as a means for academic exploration and building a healthier community.

MURPHY HIGH SCHOOL: FARM TO TABLE

Spire has also teamed up with Murphy High School in Mobile to open the school system's first "Farm to Table" program and teaching farm. For years, Murphy's science, math and culinary teachers had envisioned a farm to table "teaching farm" program, where students could learn how to grow and cook healthy foods. Spire collaborated with Murphy as a part of a "Connected Through Cooking" community initiative and provided them with the necessary funding to establish the teaching farm and



MURPHY HIGH SCHOOL: FARM TO TABLE

supporting curriculum. Spire used their established relationship with Jones Valley Teaching Farm to provide guidance on how to build a successful farm and shared access to and education about healthy, sustainable foods.

The program has expanded beyond Murphy High School with several other local schools visiting the farm to get a hands-on learning experience. The goal is to expand the program's benefits to students of all grade levels in the community and provide support to local area food desert communities with produce grown at the farm.

EXCEPTIONAL ANGLERS: GONE FISHIN' NOT JUST WISHIN'

For 28 years, Spire has used the energy of their employees to help

reel in smiles at the "Gone Fishin' Not Just Wishin'" event held at Oak Mountain State Park. The event teaches basic fishing skills to students with special needs from Alabaster and Pelham city schools and the Shelby and Jefferson Counties school systems. Spire provides more than 150 volunteers over the 3-day event to assist students with fishing, arts and crafts, karaoke, storytelling and learning about aspects of water safety, including the proper use of life jackets.

Hampton shared, "Spire wants to be ingrained in the community – a fabric of the community – where we strive to not only keep everyone in the areas we serve warm when it's cold outside, but to also let them know they are supported by a company who cares. We give back to the community because we know it is our mission to serve the great people in the great state of Alabama." **BA**

The Business Advocate is published by the Business Council of Alabama, a non-partisan, statewide business association representing the interests and concerns of nearly 1 million working Alabamians through its member companies and its partnership with the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama. For more information on the Business Council of Alabama please contact us at (800) 665-9647 or visit us online at bcatoday.org.