

Building the Future Together

Every community's future depends on the strength of its people. For Moore County, one of our greatest opportunities lies in preparing the next generation of health care professionals who will care for our families, support our growing economy and ensure access to high-quality health care close to home.

That is why the partnership between FirstHealth of the Carolinas and Sandhills Community College is so important.

Health care is one of the region's fastest-growing industries, and meeting tomorrow's workforce needs requires long-term planning, strong partnerships and a shared commitment to creating meaningful opportunities for local students. Together, through FirstFutures, FirstHealth and Sandhills Community College, we are building a workforce pipeline that connects education directly to employment, helping students discover rewarding careers while strengthening the health care system our communities depend on.

The results are already encouraging. Sandhills Community College now serves more than 11,000 students, with enrollment in health care programs continuing to grow. Nursing, radiography, surgical technology, respiratory therapy, medical laboratory technology and numerous credentialing programs are preparing hundreds of future health care professionals each year. Just as important, student success continues to reflect the quality of that education, with exceptional licensure pass rates across multiple programs.

Our partnership extends well beyond the classroom. FirstHealth and Sandhills Community College are working together to identify workforce needs, align educational programs with high-demand careers and remove barriers that prevent students from entering the profession.

One of the most exciting aspects of this partnership is the expansion of apprenticeships. By combining classroom instruction with paid, hands-on experience, apprenticeships allow students to earn while they learn and develop valuable skills alongside experienced health care professionals. Together, we are building a model that removes barriers for students while creating a sustainable pipeline of skilled professionals for our region.

This partnership is about far more than filling positions. It is about creating opportunities for local residents and ensuring that future generations have access to exceptional care.

The future of health care will be shaped by the decisions we make today. By investing in education, supporting students and strengthening partnerships, we are building a healthier, stronger and more resilient Moore County.

Together, we are creating opportunities that will benefit our communities for decades to come.



Mickey Foster

Chief Executive Officer, FirstHealth of the Carolinas



26-170-1134



Dr. Alexander M. "Sandy" Stewart

President, Sandhills Community College





Natalie Hawkins, Moore County Economic Development Partnership president, says location, workforce development and quality of life help fuel the growing local economy.

Moore County sports a diverse economy that includes defense, manufacturing and tourism, thanks to worldclass golf. Expanding transportation and workforce development assets are strengthening its game and meeting the needs of a growing population.

Moore County and big golf are synonymous. It's home to more than 40 public and private courses, the best-known being Pinehurst Resort's No. 2.

Designed by Donald Ross, it will host the men's and women's U.S. Opens in consecutive weeks in 2029. It did the same in 2014, the first and only other time that arrangement has played out.

No. 2 and the Resort's No. 4 course will host the U.S. Women's Amateur next year.

But away from the lush fairways and big-name tournaments, which are pillars in Moore's tourism industry, which draws more than 1 million visitors annually, the county is steadily gaining recognition as an address within a variety of industries.

"Moore County's economy is strong because it is diverse," says Natalie Hawkins, Moore County Economic Development Partnership president. "As the Home of American Golf, tourism is an economic engine that supports recreation, accommodations, hospitality, retail and small businesses across the county. Healthcare, anchored by FirstHealth of the Carolinas, is our largest industry employer, and it keeps growing alongside our population. Manufacturing also remains a steady, often under-the-radar contributor, and we've recently seen an uptick in professional, scientific and technical jobs that continue to help diversify our local economy."

The EDP received 109 business leads and worked with 29 active projects across several industries

in this year's first quarter. They represented a variety of industries, more than 1,225 jobs and \$595.5 million in capital investment, according to its website. In February, the EDP was awarded a \$75,000 Rural Business Development Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to obtain a Biofuel Development Opportunity rating, the first in North Carolina. It helps pave the way for investments and jobs connected to biomass businesses, which create energy from organic materials.

Hawkins wants Moore County to seize that momentum. "I'd like to see development of one or more business parks, so we can meet the needs of businesses wanting to move to and expand in our community," she says. "I also hope to see continued

investments in infrastructure by our local governments and workforce development by our educational institutions. Moore County offers a rare combination of small-town charm and big-city amenities, from nationally recognized healthcare to world-class golf to a thriving cultural arts scene woven through our historic downtowns. This blend of high quality of life, natural beauty and strong community character makes Moore County a place where businesses, families and visitors alike can put down roots and thrive."



Moore County is home to world class golf, arts and equine events. All contribute to its high quality of life.



Moore County's location is attractive to an increasing number of defense companies, including weapons-system maker Kraken Kinetics, which has offices in Pinehurst. It's near Fort Bragg, the U.S. Army's largest base by population, about 50,000 soldiers.

MILITARY INVASION

Moore County businesses secured more than \$25 million in Department of Defense prime contracts in 2023, according to the EDP. That makes defense one of the county's top industries. "Moore County's defense-sector growth isn't happening by accident," Hawkins says. "It's a direct extension of our proximity to Fort Bragg, the largest military installation in the world [by population, about 50,000 soldiers]. We're seeing defense companies choose Moore County not just for the workforce but for the quality of life."

Modern weapons-system maker Kraken Kinetics has offices in Pinehurst and is one of five companies named by the Pentagon in May in its Lethality Prize Challenge, part of the Drone Dominance initiative to arm small, less than 20-pound drones. And defense contractors Titan Echelon and AVA Technologies, whose work aligns with national security, special government operations, aerospace and technology development, each broke

ground on corporate aircraft hangars at Moore County Airport in June.

Moore County Airport Director Rick Cloutier says Titan Echelon and AVA Technologies reflect a broader trend in the region. "The Sandhills already has a significant defense presence because of its proximity to Fort Bragg, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command and a growing cluster of government contractors," he says. "These companies reinforce the airport's role as a strategic location for aviation, defense and technology businesses while diversifying the local economy beyond tourism and golf."

The Pinehurst-Aberdeen-Southern Pines region is a popular choice for military members for life after the service. Many were once stationed at Fort Bragg, which is a short 45-minute drive away. They're contributing to Moore County's growing population, which is expected to be 117,181 by 2030, up from 110,275 in 2025, according to the N.C. Office of State Budget and Management.

Locally known. Nationally recognized.

Of course, we're proud of the recognition. Being consistently named among the nation's best health systems to work means our board certified physicians are honored to call FirstHealth home. And national recognition for medical excellence and patient satisfaction reflect our ongoing dedication to world-class treatments and compassionate care.

But it's the hello at the local coffee shop, the wave at the dog park or the invite to a neighborhood event that matters most.

Because when you know your patients by name, excellence feels personal.

You don't have to travel far for world-class health care.

It's right here at home.

Will Harris, M.D.
Interventional Cardiology

FirstHealth.org





Sandy Stewart is president of Sandhills Community College, where the number of military and dependent students has doubled since 2023.

Sandy Stewart is president of Sandhills Community College in Southern Pines, which helps soldiers transition to civilian life. "Moore County is home to a military population, which is unique in the world in terms of their function, training and mission," he says. "The quality of life makes this the place they want to live, raise families and often go into business as they transition out of active duty. Sandhill's military and dependent student population has doubled in the last three years, so we invest a lot in supporting that student population. We also work with the defense sector for workforce development and overall business support through customized training, developing apprenticeships and in partnerships with a lot of groups and organizations like the North Carolina Military Business Support Center."

SPECIALIZED TRAINING

Moore Innovative High School welcomed its first class in August 2025. A cooperative high school, MIHS is a joint venture between Moore County Schools and Sandhills Community College.

Its students earn a high school diploma alongside workforce credentials, certificates and college credit. After completing honors-level core courses, students move to SCC's technical and vocational pathways.

"All students left for summer with a career development plan completed and an updated resume for summer employment or volunteer experiences," says MIHS Principal Ashlee Ciccone. She says 58 of the original 65 students are expected to return this fall, along with 70 incoming freshmen.

Ciccone says MIHS serves a range of students, including those from first-generation college families, those wanting accelerated options and those at risk of dropping out. "We are not designed for any one type of student and seek instead to find all types of learners with a desire to learn differently in a focused and positive atmosphere," she says.

"A common misconception is that we only take the highest students in Moore County. This could not be further from the truth. Instead, we are seeking students who want to connect to their schooling in a unique way and are committed

to working cohesively with our team to ensure their own success. Systems and processes built into our school day ensure that students can be successful in a rigorous environment, leaving MIHS as a prepared professional no matter their next step."

MIHS is held on the second floor of SCC's Van Dusen Hall in Pinehurst. Students pursue careers in many industries. "Additionally, MIHS also hosted several professionals from local, state and federal levels for criminal justice based on student interest," Ciccone says. "Plans for working with industry partners are being organized now. We intend to visit local workplaces with our sophomore students with decisions about specializations beginning in the spring of the sophomore year."

Stewart says MIHS is an important addition to SCC's efforts to expand educational opportunities. "For many years, we have had the SandHoke Early College High School at our Hoke County campus, so the concept is not a new one for the college," he says. "The difference with MIHS is its emphasis on the skilled trades and applied sciences.



Moore Innovative High School welcomed its first class in August 2025. A cooperative school, its students earn a high school diploma, workforce certificates and college credit.

PHOTO CREDIT: MOORE INNOVATIVE HIGH SCHOOL AND SANDHILLS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

IT'S NOT SO MUCH THE SCORE,
IT'S HOW YOU GOT THERE.

IT STARTS *Here.*

Every visit here is the start to something incredible – because there's always something new to discover—and to inspire. On the hallowed grounds of Pinehurst, the timeless spirit of the game is alive in every swing. Start your tradition at pinehurst.com/packages



PINEHURST.COM

So, it really addresses a need across Moore County and the state for workforce development, providing incredible opportunities for these students. Sandhills has really embraced what we call a One College model, which fully integrates our workforce programs and general college transfer degree programs. This opens a multitude of educational pathways and strives to meet the needs of all students. The college has also placed a heavy emphasis on working with those leading industries in Moore and Hoke counties."

SCC's educational opportunities are connected to workforce development, too. "Our student population is growing, and a lot of people don't realize that the average age of our students is 32," he says. "So, we serve students from all sorts of backgrounds and serve the community in a multitude of ways. Community colleges are at their best when they are embedded in the community, and the community is embedded in the college."

Defense-sector programs, for example, are part of an SCC extension model. "[It] can help businesses grow, create student opportunities and ensure that our programs are relevant to what our community needs," Stewart says.



Sandhills Community College prepares its students, whether they're fresh from high school or returning to sharpen skills, for a variety of well-paying and in-demand jobs.



PHOTO CREDIT: SANDHILLS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The board of trustees recently approved the LS3P architecture firm's latest rendering for the college's new workforce training facility.

MIHS, along with SCC's other educational and training efforts, is making Hawkins' job easier. "Students earning a diploma alongside industry credentials on the Sandhills Community College campus is building the talent pipeline our employers are asking for," she says.

COMMUNITY CARE

Healthcare employs nearly 30% of Moore County's private sector workforce, according to the EDP. Most work for Pinehurst-based FirstHealth of the Carolinas, which was named to the *Forbes* America's Best Employers list in 2025. Its 6,300 workers staff four hospitals and specialty clinics, including a comprehensive cancer center and Reid Heart Hospital, across 15 counties.

Pinehurst Medical Clinic's 160 providers treat patients at 15 locations in Moore and adjacent counties. It offers specialty care, including pulmonology, oncology,

geriatrics, cardiology, primary care and internal medicine. It recently added 3D mammography. "As one of the region's largest independent, physician-owned medical practices, our focus is on delivering exceptional care while continuing to meet the evolving healthcare needs of our growing communities," says Dr. Jennifer Szurgot, Pinehurst Medical Clinic president and internal medicine physician.

PMC was recently ranked among the top 10 Medicare Accountable Care Organization Realizing Equity, Access, and Community Health organizations. "This recognition underscores our dedication to improving patient outcomes while advancing value-based care that benefits both our patients and the broader healthcare system," says Brandon Enfinger, PMC's CEO.

Educational and career opportunities with the system are developed through its Certified

Clinical Medical Assistant program in partnership with the National Healthcare Association. PMC has received numerous

awards, including Top Place to Work in Healthcare by *Becker's Healthcare*, being recognized by the American Heart Association for fostering healthy workplace culture and 2023 N.C. Medical Group Management Association Practice of the Year.

"These recognitions reflect our commitment to employee well-being, professional development and creating a workplace culture that empowers our team to deliver exceptional care," Enfinger says.



Brandon Enfinger is CEO of Pinehurst Medical Clinic, which has 15 locations in Moore and surrounding counties.



Pinehurst Medical Clinic participates in workforce development through its Certified Clinical Medical Assistant Academy and supports community events such as the Alzheimer's Association's Walk to End Alzheimer's. Both help sustain Moore County's high quality of life.



Moore County Airport offers a variety of aviation services, including fuel, baggage handling and hanger space. Efforts are underway to return commercial service to the airport. Those daily nonstop flights to Washington Dulles Airport would fill the needs of local companies and tourists.

SKYWARD BOUND

Moore County Airport's runway measures 6,502 feet, nearly a mile-and-a-quarter long. That's enough distance to welcome a twin-engine Boeing 737. And it will help transport the region into its future. "One mile of highway will take you a mile, but one mile of runway will take you anywhere in the world," goes a popular aviation saying.

Cloutier says efforts to return commercial service to the airport are gaining momentum. "Current plans call for daily nonstop service between Moore County Airport and Washington Dulles International Airport, with a major U.S. airline evaluating the route for potential service beginning as early as spring 2027," he says. "Before service can begin, the community must successfully raise a \$3 million Minimum Revenue Guarantee fund, a common industry tool used to help launch new airline routes. Fundraising efforts continue to make progress, while the Airport Authority

is also pursuing potential federal grant opportunities to help support the project."

Dulles sets up passengers for hundreds of domestic and international destinations. Cloutier says that's more convenient than adding a drive to the next closest international airport, either Charlotte Douglas or Raleigh-Durham, to an itinerary. "The opportunity is supported by strong local demand," he says. "A 2024 market analysis found that Moore County residents and visitors purchase approximately 400,000 airline seats each year — roughly 1,200 trips every day — with the vast majority beginning at airports outside the county."

Phil Werz, president and CEO of Visit Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen, says his tourism development authority is prepared to launch a marketing campaign six months in advance of the first scheduled flight. "This would include digital advertising in and out of market, social media awareness

across all platforms, streaming TV ads, and activation in airports here and in the DC area," he says. "We are confident that the service will be very successful. We had service 20 years ago, but the Pinehurst area is much different than back then. The demand for travel is great, and a recent survey across the destination showed that almost 80% of those surveyed wanted commercial flight service. We did our homework, and the data was overwhelmingly positive. Our job is to bring more people to the destination to visit. Commercial flight service is a very logical option backed by significant research and data."

Moore County Airport has other ongoing projects. It's constructing two corporate hangars, adding a fixed base operator terminal building and investing in infrastructure to grow business aviation. "Longer term planning also includes preparing the airport for emerging aviation technologies and continuing upgrades that position it as a regional business aviation hub," Cloutier says.

Demand for aviation access is growing in the tourism and golf industry and with relocating and expanding businesses that value executive air access. "The airport continues to grow as an economic development asset serving both the golf economy and an increasingly diversified business base," Cloutier says. "Airport leadership sees commercial airline service, expanded corporate aviation, defense industry growth and tourism as complementary rather than competing priorities. Better air access helps companies recruit talent, attracts investment and makes Moore County more competitive for future economic development."

— Kathy Blake is a writer from eastern North Carolina.



ON TRACK.
SERVING NORTH CAROLINA.
Moving Your Business
FORWARD.

NORTH CAROLINA'S LARGEST PRIVATELY HELD SHORTLINE RAILROAD

Aberdeen Carolina & Western Railway provides seamless freight services with dual interchanges and a central location—connecting your business to what matters.



SEAMLESS FREIGHT SOLUTIONS

Safe, reliable, and efficient service tailored to meet your shipping needs.



DUAL INTERCHANGES

Connect to CSX in Hamlet, NC and Norfolk Southern in Aberdeen, NC for greater reach and flexibility.



CENTRALLY LOCATED

Strategically positioned in the heart of North Carolina—keeping you connected to customers and markets across the region.

— RAIL EXPERIENCES — *Worth Remembering*



All Aboard — FOR — **UNFORGETTABLE** — EXPERIENCES —

Step back in time and create lasting memories aboard our historic passenger railcars.

Perfect for:

- ✓ CORPORATE EVENTS
- ✓ TEAM BUILDING
- ✓ CLIENT ENTERTAINMENT
- ✓ HOLIDAY PARTIES
- ✓ WEDDINGS & SPECIAL OCCASIONS

*Unique venues. Exceptional service.
 Truly timeless experiences.*



TRACK RECORD. STRONG CONNECTIONS.
A Partner You Can Count On.



www.acwr.com



704-266-0644

INVITATIONS ABOUND

New golf courses, accommodations and holiday celebrations give visitors more reasons to plan a Home of American Golf trip.

Possibilities abounded in Pinehurst as the 20th century was about to begin. James Walker Tufts saw a healthier life, and others dreamed of what could be built with its sand, a core ingredient in construction materials, including concrete.

More than a century later, some of the biggest names in golf-course design saw something different but just as grand in the landscape. Its dual personalities, open with wide pathways and jagged with pine trees, would each be home to a golf course.

Pinehurst No. 10, the first course built by Pinehurst Resort in 30 years, was created by designer Tom Doak and opened in April 2024. The tee shot from its signature No. 8 hole requires clearing a nearly 30-foot mound of sand. And Pinehurst No. 11, designed by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, is under construction on the eastern wooded side of No. 10.

The two courses will share a golf shop, restaurant and a 900-acre location. "Of course, we're very excited about the projects ongoing at the Pinehurst Sandmines," says Phil Werz, president and CEO of Visit Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen. "Adding Pinehurst No. 11 next year and later the new lodge will continue to create that destination within a

destination feel that the resort wishes to achieve."

Pinehurst Sandmines' accommodations, a 26-room lodge and eight-bedroom cabin, are expected to open next year. "As a tourism development authority, we couldn't be happier with the vision [Pinehurst Resort Owner] Mr. Bob Dedman Jr. and [Pinehurst President] Tom Pashley have for the property, but also their efforts to keep Pinehurst top of mind for visitors and our rightful place as one of the finest golf destinations in the world," Werz says. "We're just lucky to live here!"

Tourism-related investments are being made and offerings unveiled across Moore County. They're ensuring golf and recreation remain its No. 2 industry, trailing only healthcare. The tourism development authority says the county attracts more than 1 million visitors annually, who spent about \$901.4 million in 2025, an increase of 2.4% from the year before. Moore's tourism industry generated \$34.2 million in state tax revenue and employed 6,528 people that year, according to Moore County Economic Development Partnership. That ranked it 10th among North Carolina's 100 counties.

A short drive from Pinehurst No.



Phil Werz, president and CEO of Visit Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen

11, upgrades are underway at two golf courses. The Country Club of Whispering Pines and Foxfire Country Club were acquired by Rolling Pines, a division of parent company Mid Pines Development Group, part of the Pine Needles, Mid Pines and Southern Pines group. Kelly Miller is managing partner of Rolling Pines. "Kelly Miller's acquisition of the Country Club of Whispering Pines and Foxfire is very encouraging," Werz says. "Presently, the renovations at Country Club of Whispering Pines are the priority, and all greens were recently sprigged, and the overall improvements made by noted and rising star golf architect Kyle Franz are outstanding. We understand that the Country Club of Whispering Pines plans to reopen sometime this September. And that means more quality golf at an affordable price will soon be available."

A man and a woman are sitting on white rocking chairs on a brick porch, viewed from behind. They are holding glasses of orange juice and looking out at a lush green golf course under a blue sky with white clouds. The porch is framed by two large white columns and an arched ceiling.

*Where the back nine
leads to the front porch.*

 Visit
**PINEHURST
SOUTHERN PINES
ABERDEEN**

Home of American Golf™

HOME OF GOLF.COM

MAKING ROOMS

Providing accommodations is the mission of Southern Pines-based McPeake Hotels. "We just opened a Courtyard by Marriott in December on Columbus Drive in Aberdeen," says company owner Bonnie McPeake. "It's 103 rooms with a restaurant, bar, indoor pool, 1,200-square-foot conference room, and it sits over there with the other three." Those other McPeake properties are Hampton Inn & Suites Southern Pines/ Pinehurst, TownePlace Suites by Marriott Southern Pines/ Aberdeen and Hilton Garden Inn Southern Pines/ Pinehurst. The four offer almost 400 rooms total.

McPeake's Hilton Garden Inn in Aberdeen won the Connie Award, Hilton's highest honor for guest

satisfaction and service excellence, in June. It recognizes the top-ranked Hilton Garden Inn in the U.S. and Canada. It was the third time it has won in its five years of operation.

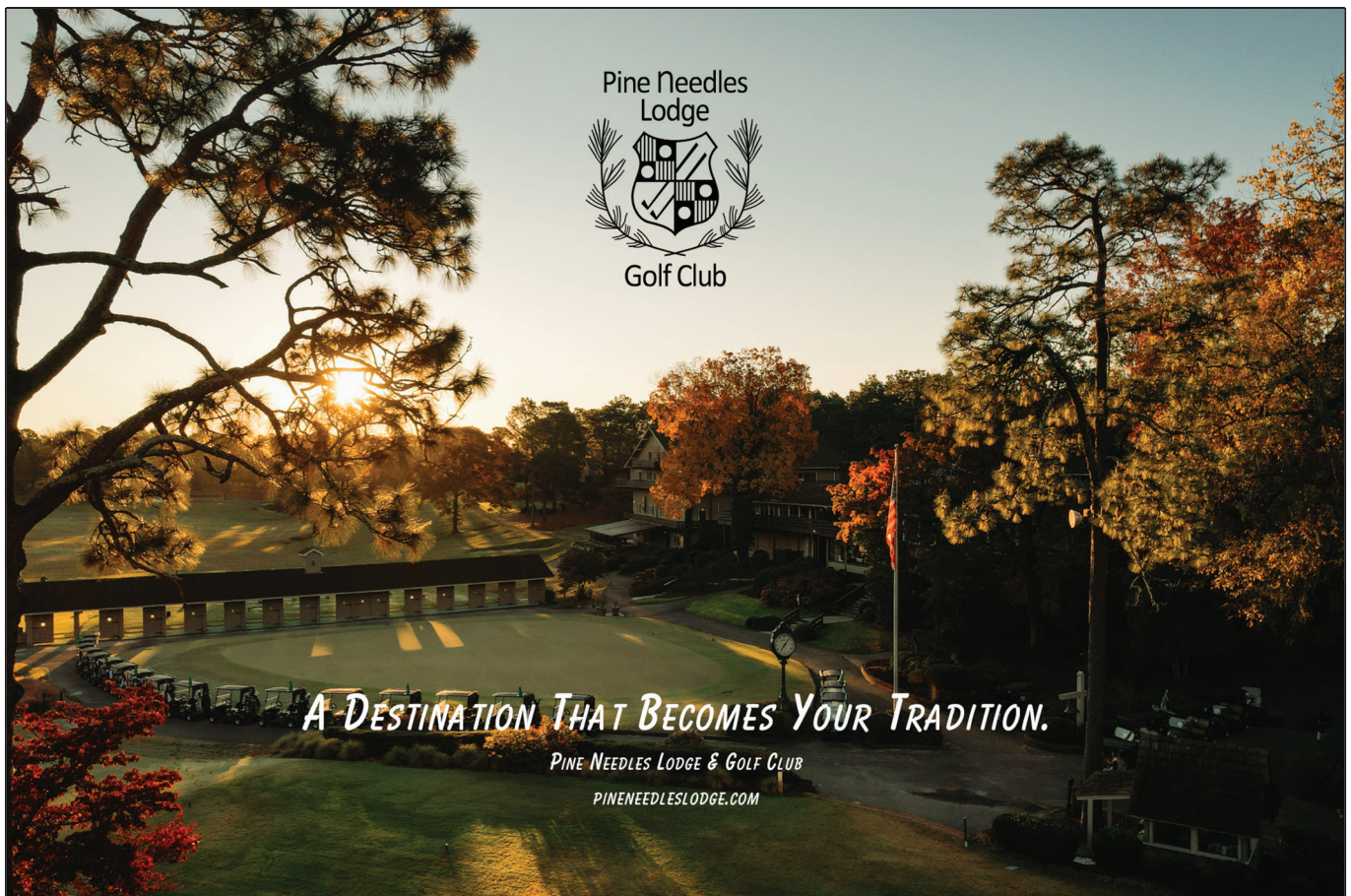
McPeake's future plans include a Tapestry Collection by Hilton boutique hotel in Southern Pines. "It's a long-term vision I've had for downtown," she says. "I think it's going to come true."

CELEBRATING THE SEASON

Visit Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen and Sandhills Community College are partnering for the Sandhills Garden of Lights display, which is slated for Nov. 27 through Jan. 10 at the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens. "We are excited," says college President Sandy Stewart. "We are blessed to have the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens, which is a

32-acre public garden on our campus and destination for thousands of visitors throughout the year. Bringing the Gardens to light in the holiday season will truly be a destination for families across the region and highlight an incredible resource at the college."

Sandhills Garden of Lights will include holiday scenes, illuminated displays and interactive experiences. "This new holiday program is a huge investment for us, as we are going all in to create a destination holiday experience," Werz says. "The idea blossomed from the fact that from mid-November to mid-January we see less lodging occupancy than any other time of the year as the demand for golf is enormously high the rest of the year. We felt if we could increase occupancy 3% to 5% during that



A DESTINATION THAT BECOMES YOUR TRADITION.

PINE NEEDLES LODGE & GOLF CLUB

PINENEEDLESLODGE.COM

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LATITUDE BUILDERS



time frame, we would really move the needle in a big way. So, we needed a big idea. The Sandhills Garden of Lights was the perfect solution as it will span a five-to-six-week period, when we can attract visitors to see the display with more than 1 million lights, plus they can take in all the other things going on in the destination for the holidays."

The Aberdeen Carolina and Western Railway Christmas Train adds to the festive holiday

experience. Werz says the Candor-based system's passenger rail cars are available throughout the year for special events and corporate rentals. It offers a Halloween adventure ride and themed excursions such as LocoMOTIVE: Diamond, Deception & Dinner mystery trip.

Werz says when Moore County's quaint downtowns are filled with holiday decorations, they're often described as scenes from a Hallmark holiday card or movie. "When you

blend in all the tree lightings across Moore County, the Aberdeen Carolina and Western Railway Christmas Train and all the holiday events, we feel like we have a hidden gem family friendly holiday experience awaiting everyone," he says. "Plus, lodging rates are at their best that time of year. And if it's warm, then golf is a bonus!" ■

— Kathy Blake is a writer from eastern North Carolina.

Practice

HERE

Join one of the largest physician owned multi-specialty and primary care organization in the region.



MAKE PINEHURST HOME.

Pinehurst Medical Clinic is actively recruiting. Scan to learn more about our career opportunities.

pinehurstmedical.com | 910.295.5511

