

The Grass Stage

A letter from the President & CEO

There is a pine tree native to this coast that spends the first years of its life pretending to be a clump of grass.

The longleaf once covered ninety-two million acres from Virginia to Texas, and Glynn County sat in the middle of it. A longleaf seedling comes up, and then for about five years, it does nothing you can see. No trunk. No height. Just a tuft of needles at ground level while, underneath, it drives down a taproot and thickens its root collar. Foresters call it the grass stage. Walk past a longleaf seedling in April and you would swear the planting had failed.

Then the root collar reaches an inch across, and the tree leaves the ground behind at three feet a year. It bears its first cones around thirty years on. It lives two hundred and fifty.

I thought about that tree a good deal this year, because this was the year the ribbons got cut.

Buc-ee's. Amazon. Hillpointe. Jered. Four grand openings, roughly two hundred million dollars of investment and about four hundred fifty jobs. Announced in earlier years, this year finally open and hiring.

And I want to say plainly, that I did not plant any of it.

Every one of those projects was a prospect before it was a press release, and raw acreage before it was a prospect. Somebody sat in a room years ago and voted to buy land that nobody could yet see a use for. Somebody engineered the site. Somebody answered a site consultant's questions for eighteen months and never heard back. Some of those people sit on our Board today. Some had moved on before I ever got here. The harvest we celebrated this year was their planting, and the right thing to do in a year-end letter is to say so out loud.

Which makes the real question this: what did we put in the ground in FY2026?

In October we bought Mallard Industrial Park, approximately two hundred fifty acres off Highway 82 that grew timber for Weyerhaeuser and will now grow something else. If you drove out there this summer, you would have found a crew taking soil borings in a field.

That is the entire visible accomplishment. Underneath it: entrance road design, GDOT permitting, GRAD certification in process, and a state site development award that says Georgia thinks this ground is worth the trouble. Grass stage.

Georgia Breakbulk Logistics Park was named a CSX Select Site — fourteen hundred acres of former timberland that a railroad will now vouch for to the world. Grass stage.

We launched Elevate Glynn with the Lucas Center for Entrepreneurship: better than a million dollars of microloans, revolving loan capital, and matching grants aimed squarely at the ninety-five percent of businesses here that employ fewer than fifty people. We made thirty-six visits to industries already operating here, because the best economic development project is usually one that is already a part of our community. And we put students in front of employers at the Talent Discovery Showcase and on National Signing Day.

Not one of those things will cut a ribbon this year.

To our Board of Governors, who keep voting for things that will not pay off on their own watch — thank you. To Glynn County and the City of Brunswick, to the Chamber, to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, to Georgia Power and our utility partners, to Coastal Pines Technical College, the College of Coastal Georgia, and the Golden Isles College & Career Academy, and to every employer who let us in the door this year: thank you. And to a staff of three who carried a project pipeline of more than forty projects through all of it — I know what that cost, and so should everyone reading this.

The longleaf is the longest-lived pine in the South, and it earns that by refusing to hurry. We are planting for a Golden Isles that many of us will not be working in. That is what makes all of this worthwhile.

Ryan Moore
President & CEO
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