

ADVOCATE

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Vulcan CEO Credits Success to Hard Work and Mentors

In mythology, Vulcan is often shown with a blacksmith's hammer. A hammer is part of Foley manufacturer Vulcan Inc.'s image that harkens back to the company's roots 81 years ago in Birmingham, where a statue of Vulcan presides from atop Red Mountain.

Tommy Lee, Vulcan, Inc.'s president and CEO, wields a hammer of sorts - the 2016 Business Council of Alabama's chairman's gavel that was ceremoniously passed to him in December by 2015 BCA Chairman Marty Abrams, president and managing shareholder of Abrams & Associates P.C. in Florence.

Lee is the 30th chairman of Alabama's premier business advocacy organization that, with the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama, represents more than 1 million workers.

He's the second Lee in the family to hold the BCA chairman's title. His older brother, retired Vulcan President and CEO Robert W. "Bubba" Lee, was chairman in 1995-96. "Bubba" Lee is the BCA's only chairman emeritus and is an icon within the BCA ranks. The Robert W. "Bubba" Lee Political Courage Award is named for him.

It was through his brother that Tommy Lee became involved with the BCA that was created in 1985 with the merger of Associated Industries of Alabama and the Alabama Chamber of Commerce.

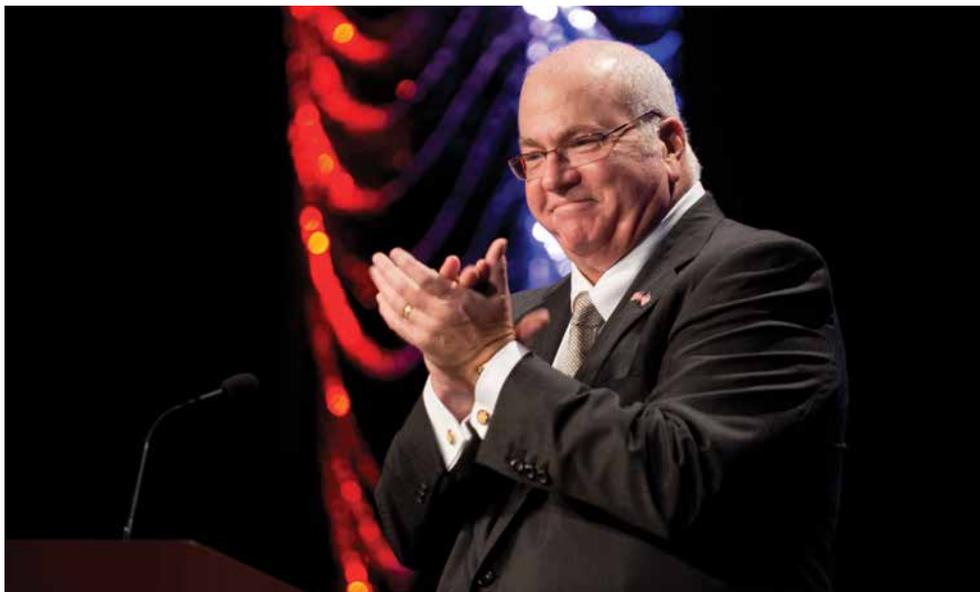
"I started coming to different events and signed up to get onboard, and then was given the opportunity to join the board of directors," Lee said. "I had been involved with the BCA for a few years and I said I was willing to help anyway I could."

BCA President and CEO William J. Canary asked Lee if

COVER: Foley businessman Thomas M. “Tommy” Lee, the Business Council of Alabama’s 2016 chairman, is at work at Vulcan Inc., an aluminum product manufacturer in Foley. Vulcan Inc. divisions include an aluminum rolling mill, a coil processor, and supplies to automotive, irrigation, and building products markets. Vulcan is the largest sign manufacturer in the United States, making stop signs, yield signs, and underground water, gas, and other utility signs. (Photo contributed)

TOP: BCA 2016 Chairman Tommy Lee started attending different BCA events and accepted an opportunity to join the board of directors as second vice chairman. Serving a year as second vice chairman was followed by first vice chairman and then election as chairman, which occurred in December 2015. Lee said previous BCA chairs encouraged him to seek BCA leadership roles.

TOP: BCA 2016 Chairman Tommy Lee’s year will include presiding over board meetings and numerous BCA events, guiding BCA efforts in the Alabama Legislature and Washington, D.C., and calling on members and prospective members.



he would be willing to serve as second vice chairman. “There was a great confidence in Tommy leading a great manufacturing firm, his belief in the free enterprise system, and in his desire to continue Alabama’s journey toward education excellence and to continue building a climate where business can thrive and prosper,” Canary said.

First vice chairman followed in 2015 and with it, chairman of ProgressPAC, the BCA’s political arm.

Lee counts former chairs as mentors: 2015 BCA Chairman Marty Abroms, 2014 BCA Chairman Fred McCallum, 2013 BCA Chairman Carl Jamison, CPA, 2010-11 Chairman Sandy Stimpson, and 2003-04 Chairman Charles Nailen Jr. Jamison is a shareholder at JamisonMoneyFarmer PC in Tuscaloosa, Stimpson is Mobile’s mayor, and Nailen is president and owner of BBG Special Foods Inc./Taco Bell in Dothan.

“They have been such great leaders for BCA through the years,” Lee said. “We wouldn’t be in the business climate we are in today without the leadership of all these people.”

McCallum and Lee were fraternity brothers at Auburn where Lee graduated with a degree in Industrial Engineering. “When he started becoming involved in BCA, I knew him and his character and the leadership skills he had and knew he was interested in helping BCA,” said McCallum, president of AT&T Alabama.

Lee inherits a sound BCA agenda of improving education as a vital tool to accomplish personal and business success and advance economic development. “Our overriding issue is making sure our education is the best it can be for the children of our state so we can produce the workforce we need,” Lee said.

In that vein, the BCA formed the Business Education Alliance with (former State School Superintendent) Dr. Joe Morton at the helm.

The BEA report, “Teachers Matter,” advocates teacher mentoring and a system of rewards. “We’ve got to help teachers with not only a salary increase but also encourage them to mentor other teachers in their ranks

and to go into underprivileged areas and create success there,” Lee said.

Lee said the BCA is solidly in support of Alabama’s College and Career Ready Standards, a vital tool to help students become proficient in math and English language skills. They’re important to business because they enable students to compete with counterparts nationally and internationally and prepare them for further education or the work force.

“They help move Alabama’s needle to the positive,” Lee said. “I am opposed to any attempt that would allow anyone to set academic standards but the State Board of Education.”

As a manufacturer, Lee said two areas are especially important to him. “One is the Alliance for Alabama’s Infrastructure and the other is our right-to-work status,” he said.

The AAI supports more investment in Alabama’s surface transportation infrastructure, a vital BCA issue that is in this year’s legislative session. “In the magazine, Site Selection, the magazine most CEOs turn to when looking to expand, their second-most important criteria is highway accessibility,” Lee said.

Enhancing Alabama’s right-to-work status will continue Alabama’s manufacturing growth, Lee said.

An Alabama right-to-work constitutional amendment was expected to quickly move through the House and Senate this legislative session and be placed on the November ballot so voters can enshrine right-to-work, which has been a state law since 1953, in the Constitution.

Lee said BCA partnerships such as the Alabama Aerospace Industry Association, the Alabama Automotive Manufacturers Association, the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “make us stronger and enable us to speak as one voice.”

Another BCA initiative this year is creation of a cabinet-level Small Business Advocate.

“It’s very difficult for a small business person to run a business on a day-to-day basis, attend meetings, go to rallies, to even get involved at the chamber level, much less the state level,” Lee said. “The BCA provides small business the opportunity to have your voice heard.”

Although Vulcan Inc. with 285 employees doesn’t qualify as a small business by some definitions, Vulcan does business with as many as 100 small businesses.

Vulcan became the first Employee Stock

BOTTOM LEFT: 2016 BCA Chairman Tommy Lee, president and CEO of Vulcan Inc. in Foley, speaks at a BCA function. A successful manufacturer, Lee said he has three guiding business principles: “Safety is the No. 1 priority here at Vulcan. Second, you have to take care of your people and third, there’s no substitute for simple, hard work, making sure you take care of little details.”

BOTTOM RIGHT: Lee said the partnership between business and education is important in order to produce the best workforce possible that will sustain Alabama’s business profitability in future generations. Lee said mentoring and rewarding teachers is part of a successful education strategy as is continued support for Alabama’s College and Career Ready Standards. As a manufacturer, Lee said, it’s important for business to get behind the Alabama Alliance for Infrastructure’s support for road and bridge investment. Success of a right-to-work constitutional amendment on the November ballot will ensure that Alabama will remain competitive in retaining and adding jobs, Lee said.



TOP: BCA 2016 Chairman Tommy Lee, center, accepts the chairman's gavel from 2015 Chairman Marty Abroms, right, accompanied by BCA President and CEO William J. Canary. Lee is president and CEO of Vulcan Inc. in Foley and Abroms is president and managing shareholder of Abroms & Associates PC in Florence. Following Lee's election in December by the BCA board of directors, Abroms became immediate past chairman.



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Ownership Plan business in Alabama after moving from Birmingham.

"Employee ownership has worked extremely well for us since 1975," Lee said. "Our ESOP is somewhat unusual in that it owns 100 percent of the stock and there are no outside shareholders. No employee owns more than 5 percent. I'm not even the largest stockholder.

"I think it is a very good business model because it allows you to encourage employees to participate and take ownership of their individual jobs," Lee said. "As a manufacturing company, we have a wide range of employees with different levels of education and experience and it's a way to get everybody involved in making suggestions and decisions, from top to bottom, helping us to be more profitable."

You've probably seen dozens of Vulcan products: aluminum road signs and signs for underground utilities, chair parts, and shovel tool implements.

Vulcan Inc. began as a small sign manufacturer in 1935. Over the years, the company consolidated operations in Foley, expanded, and recently invested more than \$18 million to double product capacity. Today, Vulcan Inc. occupies 32 acres, has five manufacturing divisions, and sells products

and services in all 50 states and Mexico and South America.

After graduating from Auburn University in 1978, Lee spent eight years with Alabama Power Co. and then began his career with Vulcan. He has been President and CEO for the past four years. "Bubba" Lee held both posts for the 27 prior years. Their late father, Cater Lee, was one of the first five founders and eventually became president, CEO, and chairman of the board.

Lee said he has three guiding business principles: "The first is safety. Safety is the No. 1 priority here at Vulcan. Second, you have to take care of your people. And third, there's no substitute for simple, hard work, making sure you take care of little details."

Lee's office contains a painting done for his father – the B-24 bomber that safely took him from Seething, England, where he was stationed in World War II, through 30 bombing missions over Germany, and back.

"My father was easily my hero," Lee said. "He taught me that 'No one makes it all alone, no one is successful without help from someone somewhere along the line'. I am honored to be 2016 BCA chairman, and I'm looking forward to a great year not only for BCA but also for our great state." **TBADV**