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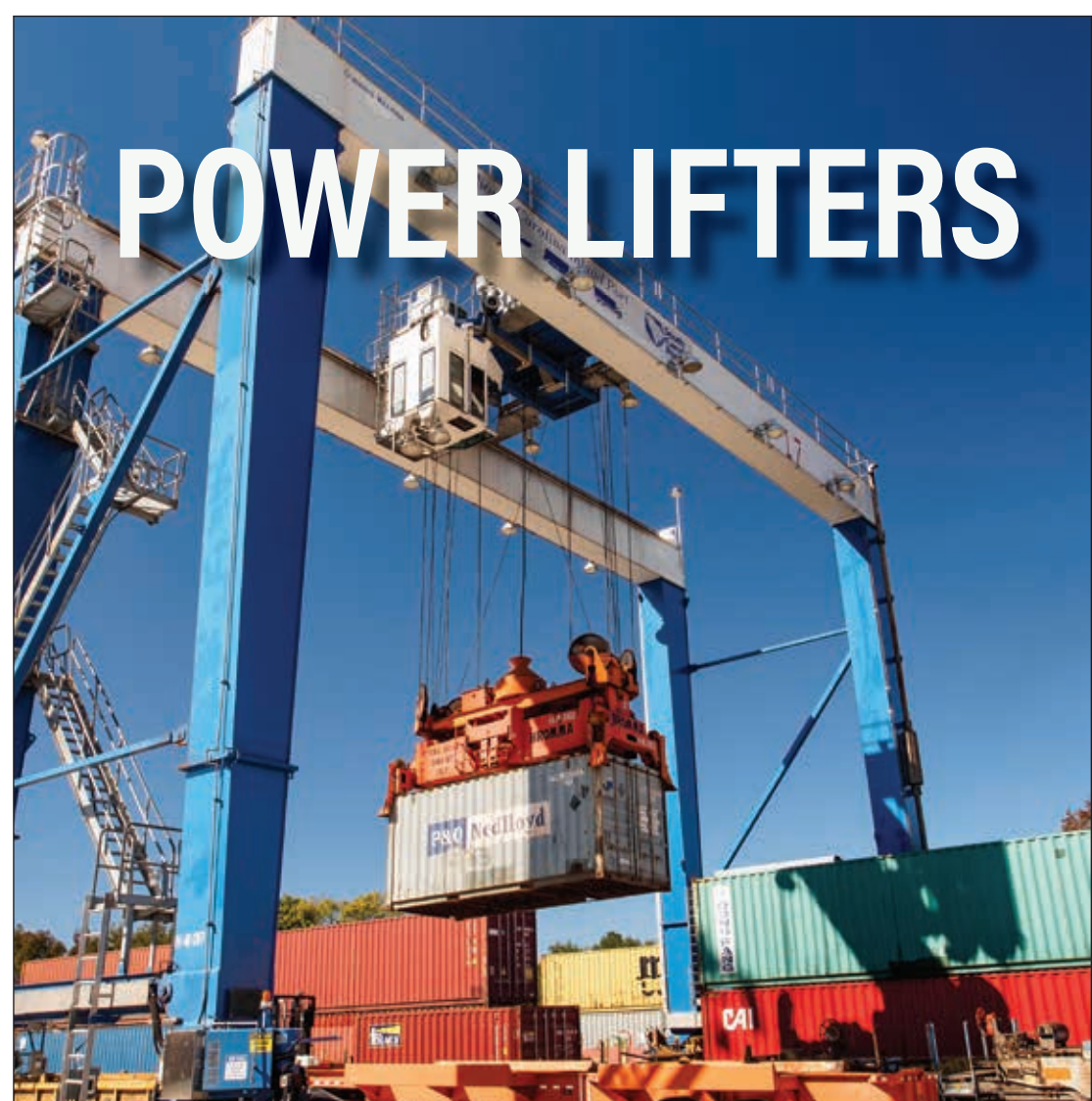
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The Upstate, with its diverse manufacturing base, is a big beneficiary of ports activities, according to a study. (Photo/SCPA)

## SC Ports turning in strong performance since pandemic

By Krys Merryman  
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The S.C. Ports Authority's annual fiscal year 2022 report shows the Upstate experiences a \$32.8 billion economic impact out of the \$63.4 billion total impact attributed to the ports, with more than \$5.5 million in capital expenditures poured into Inland Port Greer.

S.C. ports also bring in \$1.1 billion in annual state tax revenue and account for nearly 117,000 jobs in the Upstate alone because of port-dependent businesses, including recent investments from companies such as BMW, Bosch and Walmart.

The SCPA is expanding Inland Port Greer to add more cargo and rail capacity to the rail-served inland terminal, helping to speed goods

to market, according to the report. The expansion involves building additional rail processing and storage tracks within the terminal, expanding the container yard to the east and west, enlarging the existing chassis yard, and building new facilities for port operations.

Greer Mayor Rick Danner said Inland Port Greer is sort of a "hidden treasure," an enigma for residents.

"From a statewide standpoint, there is undeniable impact the inland port has on the state, the Upstate, and the city," said Danner. "It's changed the ways we do business here and the growth of distribution models we see in the Greer area. We know there is direct impact to the city in regard to its presence here. But if you tell people there is

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## Benefitfocus agrees to \$570M deal for sale to Voya

By Ross Norton  
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Voya Financial Inc., a health, wealth and investment company, intends to buy high-profile Charleston company Benefitfocus Inc., a cloud-based benefits administration technology company.

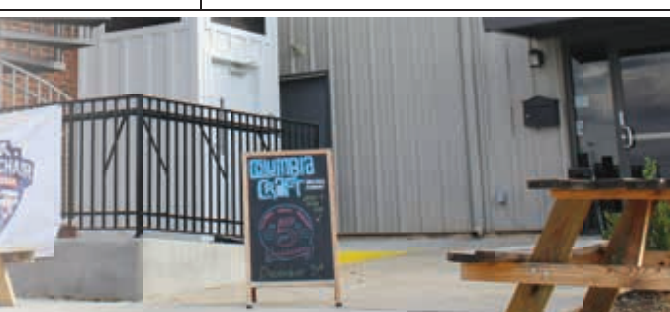
Under terms of the agreement announced in a news release and during a stockholder meeting Wednesday, Voya will acquire all outstanding shares of Benefitfocus common stock for \$10.50 per share in an all-cash transaction valued at approximately \$570 million, inclusive of Benefitfocus debt and outstanding preferred shares.

Benefitfocus serves a brokerage and consulting firm in the health and benefits industry, working through its employer and health plan customers. The company says it "touches more than 25 million lives" on its platform. Combined with its own existing workplace customers, Voya will serve approximately 38 million individuals following completion of the acquisition, according to the news release.

"Our acquisition of Benefitfocus is an exciting opportunity to accelerate our workplace-centered strategy and increase our capacity to meet the growing demand for comprehensive benefits and savings solutions at the workplace," Heather Lavallee, president and CEO-elect of Voya Financial Inc., said in the news release "Benefitfocus' exceptional talent, strong capabilities, and extensive reach across the benefits industry will expand Voya's ability to deliver innovative solutions for employers and health plans, and help improve the financial, physical and emotional wellbeing of their employees and members. At the same time, Voya's technology resources, digital capabilities, and operational expertise will add tremendous value to

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**High-Tech Beer Buying**  
Brewery crafts NFT purchasing platform.  
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## Considerations before developing beyond city limits

We often hear that all of the easy sites are gone. As a result, residential development in the Carolinas and Georgia is stretching beyond the typical suburbs into more rural areas. The math is simple: there is a scarcity of land and the land that is available has appreciated, so developers must expand their reach. This trend is playing out across the country but is particularly acute in the Southeast, which was already experiencing a development boom before the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated it.

Residential developments are extending well beyond Greenville, Raleigh and Atlanta. In some of those places, locals would have been shocked to see a new subdivision just a few years ago, let alone townhomes or apartments. But these developments can create new opportunities for local residents, businesses and governments. As residential growth occurs, the tax base grows and shopping centers, offices and other commercial growth will eventually follow.

Despite the opportunities they create, these projects often encounter resistance, including from people who like living in a rural area and want to keep it that way. Fortunately, developers can take proactive steps to address resistance and reduce locals' concerns.

To start, it is essential to understand the local requirements of an area. Zoning is an inherently local process. Best practices in one part of South Carolina may not apply in another part of the state, let alone in North Carolina or Georgia. That said, the development process in more rural areas may offer smoother and more efficient processes than cities, which often have more restrictions. No matter where you plan to build, seeking guidance from attorneys, engineers and other consultants with local experience is especially valuable.

In researching the local area, another useful step is to review the jurisdiction's long-term plans for development, which typically spell out encouraged and discouraged uses. Those plans can be a great way to gain early insight into how a project may be received by both the government and community before expending too many resources on engi-



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neering plans.

Developers should also be proactive with community outreach to address concerns and allay fears. The more they do on the front end — before they walk into the council chambers for a public hearing — the better. This is especially important as more suburban jurisdictions are requiring community meetings as part of their entitlement process, including in metro Atlanta. There can be challenges and risks with proactive outreach, but it is important for developers to share their story and the benefits of their project. Early lines of communication can lead to better outcomes than when residents are surprised to see a sign pop up on their street about a hearing in a few days.

One common concession developers should be prepared to consider is creating buffers along the project boundaries to soften the impact on neighbors who have been there for a long time. Buffering and screening can help preserve some residents' preferred way of life while also creating features that new residents can enjoy.

Outreach to local officials and stakeholders is also critical. Developers should meet with municipal staff in advance and introduce themselves and their project to local officials and decision makers. As part of those conversations, developers should be ready for questions about non-


residential uses such as retail and other elements they're not ready to develop because the density may not be there to support it. They should also be aware of the tug and pull between homeowners who want larger lots (and home values) and elected officials seeking more affordable housing solutions, which often result in smaller lots and increased density.

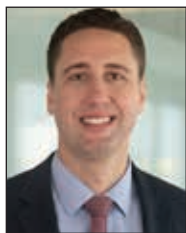
In addition, developers should be prepared to talk to local officials about the infrastructure needed to support the growth their projects will catalyze. While roads and utilities are a common focus, we've even had clients dedicate land from their project for a school to absorb the growth they would bring. Obviously, not every project can support a school, but it's an example of how developers can get creative.

A proactive step developers can consider taking to help with their outreach to the community and government officials is budgeting for the cost of a traffic study. In some cases, those are required for subdivisions. Even when they are not though, they can be a useful tool to allay concerns or identify mitigation measures

that might provide a level of comfort for residents who have concerns about traffic. Those measures can also be worked into the budget.

To boil it all down, developers who are bringing projects beyond the 'burbs and into more rural areas can smooth out that process and the accompanying unknowns through a proactive approach to engaging with the community and anticipating opposition. As noted above, the process can be made easier through partnerships with professionals who know the community well and who can guide the process.

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