

# Forward Together: Lancaster County



Presented by the  
Charlotte Regional  
Business Alliance

**Moderator: TJ McCullough**  
*President and Publisher,*  
Charlotte Business Journal

## Panelists



**Kristen Blanchard**  
*VP of Corporate Affairs*  
Nutramax

Kristen E. Blanchard is the Vice President of Corporate Affairs for Nutramax Laboratories in Lancaster, South Carolina and Maryland. Nutramax Laboratories has been in business for almost 30 years with a unique Mission Statement: To serve the Lord and glorify Him using the gifts He has given our employees to research, develop, manufacture, and market products that improve the quality of life for people and their pets.

Ms. Blanchard has been working for Nutramax Laboratories since 1997. She leads the strategic initiatives for community relations, public policy/issues management, and corporate communications ensuring the activities are consistent with the Company's mission, value and corporate culture.

She received her B.A. degree from the State University of New York at Oswego in 1990 and conducted post graduate work at the University of San Diego. She has served on several boards and committees and has presented at various webinars and seminars during her tenure at Nutramax Laboratories.



**Chris Kropac, Jr.**  
*President and Co-Owner*  
PCI Group

Chris Kropac, Jr. is the President and Co-Owner of PCI Group, a mission critical print and mail provider headquartered in Fort Mill, SC with a secondary production facility in Dallas, TX. A family owned business started by his Dad in 1970, PCI celebrated its 50th year in business in 2020. Today, PCI Group is a leading provider of highly secure, personalized, print and electronic communications that are fully compliant with the latest federal regulations, including SOC I, SOC II, HIPAA, HITRUST, PCI DSS and FISMA.

Under Chris's leadership, PCI Group has realized tremendous business growth. In 2019, PCI Group was recognized by INC 5000 for the third year in a row and fourth time over the last decade. PCI has also been recognized by the SC TOP 25 Fastest Growing Companies, South Carolina 100 list, the Charlotte Business Journal Fast 50 and has earned several other business and community awards.

Chris is an industry leader, technology innovator and vigorous advocate of inkjet printing and full integrity mail processing. He is honored to be able to share his story as a frequent conference speaker on advanced technologies in the print and mail industry. As a testament to his many years of postal customer advocacy, as a former Industry Co-Chair of the Long Island Postal Customer Council, in 2009 Chris was awarded the "PCC Industry Member of the Year" award given by Postmaster General, Jack Potter.



**Timothy P. Rogers**  
*Chief Financial Officer*  
Continental

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*Few places in America ever made a comeback like Lancaster County.*

**In 2008**, Forbes magazine named Lancaster, SC, one of the top 10 most vulnerable towns because of high unemployment from the closing of textile mills.

More than a decade later, Lancaster has rebuilt its economy based on advanced manufacturing and corporate headquarters.

“Lancaster County has one of most remarkable stories you will find in the Charlotte region,” says Jamie Gilbert, executive director of Lancaster County Department of Economic Development. “It’s one of the most balanced economies you will find in South Carolina and always top for new and expanding businesses.”

Three businesses that relocated to Lancaster County to enjoy exponential growth joined a panel discussion sponsored by the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance and presented by the Charlotte Business Journal.

The panel was part of an ongoing series of discussions sponsored by the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance and presented by the Charlotte Business Journal highlighting the diversity of the 15-county Charlotte region.

TJ McCullough, president and publisher of the Charlotte Business Journal, moderated a discussion among the leaders of three Lancaster County businesses that have contributed to the county’s rapid transformation. Those included Kristen Blanchard, vice president corporate affairs, Nutramax Laboratories, which researches, manufactures, and markets nutritional supplements for people and their pets, Chris Kropac, president of PCI Group, a direct mail company, and Tim Rogers, CFO of Continental Tire the Americas, LLC.

### On reasons for relocating

PCI Group began in the late 1960s as a direct mail business in Long Island, New York. While Kropac loved his hometown, the cost of doing business there was a challenge.

“We came for the tax and utility cost savings but also for the business environment,” Kropac says of the 2008 move. “In New York you have to hit a homerun every single day just to survive. Here singles and doubles are great. It’s a great place to live and work.”

Likewise, Nutramax wanted to expand but encountered many roadblocks to expansion in Maryland, Blanchard says.

“The cost of expansion in Maryland can be very challenging,” Blanchard says. “The expansion to Lancaster was pivotal for us. We had the ability to find land, find buildings and amazing employees.” Nutramax quickly formed strong relationships in the Lancaster community which are vital to collaboration and problem solving.

Continental moved just over the state line from Charlotte to Lancaster County in 2009. The tire manufacturer was ceasing production at its Charlotte manufacturing plant and needed land for a new headquarters facility. Continental has global revenues of just under \$50 billion USD and employs over 230,000 globally (2019 figures). The company makes tires under the Continental and General brands but also makes hoses, conveyor belts, braking systems and other technology for the automotive industry.

“South Carolina does so much to support its business so it’s a fantastic place to be,” Rogers says. “If I had it to do over again I would pick Lancaster County.”

### On why Lancaster County

Continental was one of the first major corporations to arrive in Lancaster County as the community was suffering from major job losses. The move provided fertile ground for Continental to grow its business across the Americas, while keeping all of the benefits of being near Charlotte, including the international airport, Rogers says.

“It is not hard to recruit people to the Charlotte area and Lancaster County as well,” Rogers says. “Everything we thought would be good about Lancaster County beforehand came true.”

Nutramax, which was founded by Dr. Bob Henderson in Maryland, considered other South Carolina counties before settling on Lancaster for its animal health division.

“Our growth has been tremendous,” Blanchard says. The vast majority of Nutramax’s 750 employees are located in Lancaster County. And there are close to 50 open positions at the Lancaster County locations in a variety of fields from manufacturing to quality control/chemistry as well as marketing, IT and finance. .

Kropac says he first considered Atlanta as a new location for his direct mail business before exploring Charlotte.

“When you grow up on Long Island, you think it’s the cat’s meow, that there is no better place in the world, so this was a big decision,” says Kropac.

He flew to Charlotte having never visited and was struck by the lack of traffic and opportunity for growth. Since its arrival, PCI Group has grown four-fold. The 22 employees that came from New York now measures 200 in Lancaster County with 25 open positions.

“If it wasn’t for me being down here, I don’t think I’d be where I am now and might not be in business right now,” Kropac says.

### On expansion

Lancaster County is not only the headquarters for Continental’s tire brand but also serves as an administrative and professional services hub for all of its divisions that serve the automotive technology and rubber products industries.

The company had 300 employees in Lancaster County when it opened there in 2009. Today, the headcount is over 600.

To support that growth, Continental is investing more than \$25 million to build a new 88,000 square foot building next to its current headquarters. The building is expected to open in 2022.

“We are bursting at the seams,” Rogers says, “We are finding that the pandemic rebound has been strong, and we continue to grow.”

Likewise, Nutramax is investing in more manufacturing and office space at its Lancaster headquarters.

“We are now in the process of tripling the size of one of our buildings to 110,000 square feet of packaging, warehouse and QC space and 50,000 square feet of office space,” Blanchard says. “These investments have triggered a domino effect with an economic impact on the entire region.”

### On community impact

Panelists say their growth has allowed them to make an impact beyond just the people they employ in Lancaster County. Community outreach became even more important in 2020 as local businesses navigated the uncertain impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2020, Nutramax provided over \$1.3 million in support to local nonprofits and other organizations. Also in 2020 Nutramax launched an effort to lessen the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on local small businesses, especially local restaurants called the “4:10 Initiative” based on 1 Peter 4:10. All Lancaster employees received a voucher each week worth \$10 to \$15 to spend at local restaurants. Nutramax paid each restaurant every two weeks for the value of the vouchers used.

“At a time when restaurants didn’t know what to do, it was invaluable,” Blanchard says. “We also provided vouchers to first responders and nonprofits.”

In addition, Nutramax provided cleaning supplies to local salons and barbershops that were following increased protocols to keep their businesses clean of the virus.

“We helped probably 50 salons that run on thin margins,” Blanchard says. “We have been blessed and humbled to serve our community, and we hope we inspire others to do the same. It all comes back to the first part of our Mission Statement - “To serve the Lord and Glorify Him.”

PCI Group has been a major supporter of Junior Achievement and sponsors kids’ sports teams.

A strong culture that engages with the community helps drive employee recruitment, Rogers says. Continental plays a role on the boards of such organizations as Children’s Theater of Charlotte, Communities in Schools, and the Anne Springs Close Greenway. The tire manufacturer also volunteers at different organizations including local schools.

“We are very fortunate to have great jobs and live in this area, and it’s important to give back,” Rogers says.

### On challenges in relocating

Kropac says the only challenge he encountered after moving to Lancaster County was discovering the local workforce did not have experience in the direct mail industry. Kropac soon resolved that issue by creating PCI University, an internal training program. The three days of classroom instruction provides a foundation for new employees to succeed in the business.

“What was a negative in the beginning ended up being a huge positive,” Kropac says.

### On supply chain issues

Businesses in Lancaster County traversed global trends and challenges in the past year.

Kropac says the biggest disruption to his fully domestic business was the slowing of mail through the US Postal Service and ongoing debate about how to manage the postal service.

Blanchard says Nutramax relied on long-standing relationships, which helped minimize disruptions.

The pandemic has strained the global supply chain in places, Rogers says. While trade is moving again, Rogers says there continue to be ripple effects. He expects a shortage of microchips this year, which will impact the automotive industry.

Likewise, the winter storm that shut down Texas’ deregulated energy grid this winter and the week-long blockage of the Suez Canal created more friction.

“We anticipate by the end of the year we’ll be back to normal.”