



MARYLAND — In March, the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation launched Maryland Business Express, a website to help entrepreneurs start, plan, grow, and manage small businesses. The website consolidates information from several state agencies to give users practical tips as well as clear tax and regulatory information. It features “Chatbot,” a digital assistant that users can access 24 hours a day, seven days a week; according to the agency, it marks the first time this kind of digital assistant technology has been used by a state government for business purposes. In April, the site was one of the winners of “State IT Innovation of the Year” from StateScoop 50, an annual nationwide awards program that honors achievements in government IT.



NORTH CAROLINA — In April, Corning announced that it will build a new manufacturing facility in Durham that will focus on one of its newest products, Valor Glass. Valor Glass is a material for pharmaceutical packaging that is more damage- and contamination-resistant than other packaging. Corning expects to invest \$190 million in the plant, which will create 300 jobs with average annual salaries projected to be more than \$65,000. Corning was awarded economic development grants by the state and the county, including two tax-reimbursement grants.



SOUTH CAROLINA — Clemson University industrial engineering professor Sara Riggs received a \$550,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to fund a five-year research project on adapting workplaces for workers with disabilities. The grant was announced in March and funding will begin in July. Riggs will bring her research into the real world by collaborating with ClemsonLIFE, a university program for students with intellectual disabilities, and Walgreens, which has a distribution center nearby.



VIRGINIA — In late March, Microsoft announced it will buy 315 megawatts of power from the planned Pleimont I and II solar facilities in Spotsylvania County; Pleimont is part of a larger 500-megawatt solar development, which will be the largest in Virginia once it is operational. It marks the largest-ever corporate purchase of solar energy in the United States. Microsoft is the first company to buy energy from the Pleimont site, which the developers say will help them offer competitive pricing to other potential buyers. Microsoft says the purchase will allow the company’s data centers in Virginia to be powered completely by solar energy.



WASHINGTON, D.C. — The arts sector generates 8.4 percent — \$10.2 billion — of D.C.’s GDP, a larger share than that of any state, according to a new report from the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the National Endowment for the Arts. The report measures economic activity related to arts and culture between 2001 and 2015. D.C.’s high concentration of federal museums and monuments, plus the Smithsonian Institute, helped push it to the top of the report’s GDP percentage list. Nationwide, according to the report, the arts contributed \$763.6 billion to the U.S. economy.



WEST VIRGINIA — In late March, three projects were awarded \$5 million in business development grants from the Commerce Department’s Economic Development Administration. The projects are projected to create or retain 755 jobs and lead to \$7.5 million worth of private investments. The three projects are the rehabilitation of the Wheeling Corrugating Plant in Beech Bottom, the expansion of a business park in the city of Weirton, and the rehabilitation of the Rahall Business and Technology Center in Greenbrier County.