

CATAWBA COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA



Catawba County, Charlotte's Great Northwest, is undergoing a rapid transformation from a smaller separate economy to becoming a choice Charlotte sub-market alternative. As an example of this diversification, the county is home to the fourth highest number of manufacturers in the state of North Carolina, Apple's largest data center, and the Hickory Furniture Mart. Hickory, Newton and Conover are focusing on renewal and revitalization projects designed to appeal to the 20-44 age grouping, and by doing that, are appealing to other age groups such as the active adult market. Housing starts are reflecting the inevitable expansion of Charlotte, particularly in the southeast Catawba County and Hickory zip codes. In the past 12 months, there have been 2,789 units permitted in these two areas alone, and the other cities are also seeing strong impacts.

Recent economic developments across the County show the transformation is working. New project announcements are evident as you drive around the County. Massive

new mixed-use retail and residential projects flanking Hickory's new 10.2 mile CityWalk have been announced. D9 Brewery has relocated their brewing operations from Huntersville to Newton, the widening of NC Highway 16 from uptown Charlotte into the heart of Catawba County is nearly complete, a new 192,000 square foot spec building in Trivium Corporate Center by Atlanta-based developer Stonemont Financial Group has been announced, and construction has begun on the Village at Sherrills Ford and the Terrell Town Center on the shores of Lake Norman in southeastern Catawba County.

Long-understood to be the home of furniture, textile, and fiber-optic manufacturing, the growth of the higher-end and modern home furnishings market, the merger of science to create advanced textiles and testing, and the advent of 5G and today's communications requirements due to COVID-19 are all ushering in surprising new growth in Catawba County. Meanwhile, Apple sits quietly in the Town of Maiden next to its three huge solar farms answering data

needs through practically every device in the marketplace. And it doesn't stop there. Recent announcements have added auto parts supplier Cataler and pharmaceutical supplier ITM to established companies like GKN, ZF, and Sarstedt, just a few of the 425 diversified manufacturing firms already in Catawba County.

A recent international prospect came in and asked three questions — "Where will I get my people; how can you add value to my operations; and do you have an appropriate site for my new facility?" New ideas always drive creative approaches in Catawba County, and the Workforce Solutions Complex and K-64 programs at Catawba Valley Community College's main campus stand out as part 1 of the 1-2-3 effort when it comes to economic development. Catawba County's Board of Commissioners understand the constant need for improving the workforce pipeline, and funded both of these efforts long before the pandemic, programs unparalleled in their approach. To address the second question, look to the Manufacturing Solutions Center

in Conover, recently awarded \$9 million in funding by the NC General Assembly and a direct appropriation from the Governor's budget, to expand entrepreneurial support efforts and commercialize ideas from pen and paper to large scale production. The third question is answered by the County's and City's investments in prepared business parks and spec buildings, answering client questions many times before they are asked.

Likewise, creative targeting initiatives that worked to land data centers in Catawba County have been reformulated to attract the expected opportunities being created by COVID-19. Targeting holes in the supply chain that have been exposed, Catawba County's Critical & Essential Recruitment Initiative is aimed at recruiting and providing special incentives to industries within the Federal Government's 16 recognized Essential & Critical Categories (see sidebar) in order to assure America's health, safety, and preparedness during this and future challenges. Learn more at www.criticalessential.com.



WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS COMPLEX



Today's manufacturers are heavily tech-based and rely on a skilled workforce to operate that technology. Companies rely on computer numerical control (CNC) machine tools, computer-aided design and manufacturing (CAD/CAM) programs, robotics, all of which are heavily computer-based. Catawba Valley Community College's Workforce Solutions Complex (WSC) will ensure a future pipeline of talent for high-tech manufacturing jobs, making our area even more attractive to new and expanding industry.

A culmination of many years of planning and collaboration with the three public school systems, the \$26 million project is funded by Catawba County Commissioners. The 80,400-square-foot facility houses engineering technology and skilled trades programs. Engineering technology programs include Computer Engineering Technology, Electrical Engineering Technology, Electronics Engineering Technology, Electrical Systems Technology, Industrial Systems Technology, Mechanical Engineering Technology and Mechatronics Engineering Technology. Skilled trades programs include Automotive Systems Technology, Computer Integrated Machining, HVACR, and Welding.

The building includes state-of-the-art classrooms, offices, HVAC lab/shop areas, welding lab/shop areas, automotive lab/shop areas, machining and CNC lab/shop area, and an engineering department, which includes: mechatronics/PLC lab, CET-EET lab, electrical wiring lab, robotics lab, 3D printing lab, computer labs, break alcoves, a lounge/media center, meeting rooms, and an open main lobby area for students to gather.

All faculty at the WSC have industry experience, certifications

and licensure in their respective field. The low student-to-faculty ratio provides students with personalized instruction that ensures a thorough understanding of the concepts and skills in each program. Work-based learning is required for all programs through apprenticeship & internship opportunities, and industry partnerships ensure that the programs are aligned with ever-changing workforce needs.

The WSC is also home to K-64, a new approach to talent development designed to positively position Catawba County in a globally competitive market. The initiative was chartered as part of the Catawba County Commissioners' Strategic Plan to proactively drive local economic and population growth in Catawba County in response to a decline in

the working-age population and the lack of a skills-ready workforce. It is a systemic approach, based on universal principles, to connecting students and employers throughout the educational curriculum to help shape future careers, meet workforce demands, and help sustain the economic development of Catawba County. The program actively engages students of all ages in preparing for viable and sustainable careers throughout their lifetime through work-based learning, the utilization of technology, career exploration, specific skills training, and character education.

What makes K-64 unique, and is key to the program's success, is the collaboration across education, business, government, and community leadership. The K-64 initiative has brought all the stakeholders to the

table and created new avenues for collaboration between Catawba County Schools, Hickory Public Schools, Newton-Conover City Schools, Catawba Valley Community College, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Catawba County Economic Development Corporation, Catawba County Chamber of Commerce, and local government and business leaders. This collaborative and systemic approach to shaping future careers and meeting workforce demands will broaden local industry awareness to the citizens of Catawba County and outside talent while connecting them to high-wage, highly-skilled career pathways. K-64 is a game changer for Catawba County, and ensures a bright, prosperous future for its residents. Learn more at www.k-64learning.com.



MANUFACTURING SOLUTIONS CENTER



Over the last 30 years, Catawba Valley Community College's Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC) has provided a competitive advantage to manufacturers around the world by helping them expand sales, increase quality, and improve efficiency to create or retain jobs. Assistance is provided from product concept through distribution including manufacturing, marketing, and sales. The MSC is a facility where innovative concepts can be brought to life. It's where products and prototypes are tested, manufacturing processes are fine-tuned, and accurate cost and product studies are performed. All of these services are available to manufacturers to help them stay at the forefront of their industry.

The center was initially established in 1990 at Catawba Valley Community College as the Hosiery Technology Center, a training center for hosiery industry workers. The goal was for workers to make the leap from operating old mechanical machines to running electronic equipment. From the beginning, however, the center has responded to the changing needs of industry and in September 2000 the center opened a Standards and Testing Laboratory. In 2009, the Hosiery Technology Center changed its name to what it is known as today, the Manufacturing Solutions Center, and in 2012, moved into their current location in Conover Station.

The MSC also works with inventors

and entrepreneurs. Different industries and technologies are being combined in new way to create new products. For example, companies are putting medicine into yarn and creating wearable technology that monitors a person's heart rate. Those who take advantage of the center's services are receiving help from people who've worked with multiple universities, including MIT, Texas Tech, and UNC-Chapel Hill, and with many well-known brands manufactured by Fortune 100 companies.

Nufabrx stands as a shining example of the assistance and support that the MSC can provide. Nufabrx was created by founder and CEO Jordan Schindler after he discovered his pillowcase was contributing to his acne. Teaming up with MIT scientists, Jordan spent seven years developing proprietary technology to embed active ingredients into yarn itself to make medicinal application easier and more efficient. Nufabrx began working with the MSC, taking up residence in the center's incubator space in 2015 to take advantage of its expertise in textiles. The company has now outgrown their space in the MSC incubator and will soon move into a new 25,000 square foot, high-tech facility in Conover.

The MSC recently received a grant from the North Carolina Community College System to purchase equipment which will provide additional testing capabilities and

product development for domestically produced PPE. In addition, the City of Conover has received funding from the State of North Carolina's PPE-NC Initiative to up-fit the MSC testing lab with a PPE lab and clean room, and construct a new 30,000 square foot facility for testing labs, rapid

prototyping and a textile sourcing library. A private developer has also planned construction of an adjoining 45,000 square foot building which will create additional incubator space for the MSC. Learn more about the MSC at www.manufacturingsolutionscenter.org.



SITES & PARKS

The new economy has changed the way economic development teams interact with site selectors and company representatives. Until recently, companies typically brought teams to visit and assess sites.

Now they are doing virtual tours, analysis by distance, and dealing with compressed scheduling. All this demands a renewed focus on site preparation, controlled parks, and modern building development.

Catawba County is meeting this new challenge. As an example, Catawba County and the City of Hickory are sharing the development costs of Hickory's Trivium Corporate Center (www.triviumcorporatecenter.com), a 270-acre Class A business park designed to appeal to high-investment, low-impact opportunities. Formally established in Spring 2018, the park gained its first two tenants that same year when Corning announced a \$60 million, 110 job fiber-optic facility in August, and ITM, a German maker of cancer treatments, announced a \$17 million, 130 job facility in December. In December 2019, Cataler, a Japanese auto parts supplier, committed to a \$42 million, 151 job project, and then in July 2020, Stonemont Financial Group, an Atlanta-based developer, committed

to construct a 192,000 square foot, expandable to 348,000 square foot, speculative manufacturing facility. The availability of 360 degree videos, exposure on interactive sites such as www.myhky.com, and digital attraction pieces assist in driving client attention. The marketplace is showing clear interest.

Catawba County and four of its municipalities have also partnered in creating a multi-jurisdictional partnership for the development of another 70-acre graded campus in Conover. With abundant electrical and water infrastructure in place, the site was initially developed for data center opportunities and has recently expanded its marketing scope to include other high-tech prospects. The Lyle Creek Technology Park (www.lylecreektechnologypark.com) has been graded to support up to three 200,000 square foot facilities and is located adjacent to I-40 and multiple fiber connections.

The recently announced Hunsucker Crossing, a 500-acre mixed use development at the intersection of Conover's Rock Barn Road and I-40, promises new opportunities across the spectrum of industrial, office, retail, hospitality, multi-family and single-family residential. Located

between Rock Barn Golf and Spa (former home of a PGA Champions Tour event) and the Manufacturing Solutions Center, this property will see rapid development changing eastern Catawba County along along Interstate 40 through the City of Claremont and the Town of Catawba.

As development continues to spread into Charlotte's Great Northwest, Catawba County is developing new opportunities in the southeast along NC Highways

16 & 150. The widening of Highway 16 has opened a direct connection between uptown Charlotte and the heart of Catawba County. This prime development corridor provides an easy 30-minute drive to Charlotte Douglas International Airport and is a prime corridor for new development of all types.

More information on these and other sites and parks is available on the EDC's website at www.catawbaedc.org.




ELECTRICITIES
 of NORTH CAROLINA, INC.

The energy behind public power

SPEC BUILDINGS

In 2014, EDC Board Chair Charlie Dixon recognized the need for the construction of modern facilities in order to provide quick solutions for economic development clients. Trying to overcome developer hesitance to build on speculation in a previously untested market, Catawba County developed a Spec Building Program with a public-private approach by covering carrying costs such as construction interest, building permit fees, interim taxes and utility connection fees for a period of up to 36 months. Upon sale or lease of the building within 36 months, the supporting city and the county would recover those costs.

Four spec buildings have been developed in Catawba County in partnership with local builders and municipalities. Spec buildings also help to drive traffic and can result in landed projects that eventually opt for other real estate in the county better suited to their needs. Catawba County's four spec buildings have led to seven landed projects with announced investment of \$79.9 million and 1,221 jobs. These companies are still operating in the county and continue to provide additional jobs and investment.

Seizing on that success, Catawba County just announced a new 192,000 square foot building by an Atlanta-based developer in Trivium Corporate Center to hit the upper end of the market. The building will have 32' ceilings and be expandable to 348,000 square feet. Stonemont Financial Group partnered with local contractor David E. Looper & Company to finance and build the spec building, citing Hickory's emergence as an important Charlotte submarket. Completion of the building to its shell state is expected by December 2020.

Another developer has received approval for a 40,000 square foot Class A facility on Hickory's Aviation Walk on US Highway 321 North. LP-321 LLC, a Hickory-based development firm, will partner with the City of Hickory and Catawba County to construct the building with completion expected in Spring 2021. Andy Wells, Manager of LP-321 LLC, feels now is the right time to build competitive new product in the Catawba market and is planning to build multiple facilities across the county following this first facility's success.

More information on these and other buildings is available on the EDC's website at www.catawbaedc.org.



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DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATIONS

Catawba County's transformation is not only economic. Several of the county's cities are transforming their downtowns into destinations designed to provide entertainment and recreational activities appealing to those seeking a more urban lifestyle.

The Hickory Trail and the newly renovated downtown are transforming the Hickory region. Spanning 10 miles across the city, the Hickory Trail, now under construction, will connect popular destinations and amenities while providing bicycle and pedestrian safety. The Trail, along with the city's culture of providing an atmosphere for dynamic growth and robust development, is a major asset in the community's effort to craft a strong economy, provide good jobs, and create a desirable quality of life.

This Trail includes a City Walk from Lenoir-Rhyne University through downtown Hickory to Old Lenoir Road; a Book Walk through the Ridgeview community, highlighting its history; an Old Lenoir Walk through a reinvigorated arts district; a Riverwalk, featuring an iconic bridge over Lake Hickory and elevated trails through the woods that border the lake; and an Aviation Walk that will offer easy access across U.S. 321 to the Hickory Regional Airport and L.P.

Frans Stadium, home of the Hickory Crawdads Minor League Baseball team.

Additionally, the city modernized aesthetics and enhanced the downtown with a distinguished promenade along Union Square storefronts, a central pathway bisecting two large lawn areas, additional seating areas called garden rooms or parklets, enhanced lighting, new directional signage, entrance archway, and Wi-Fi provided by CommScope. The renovation also included new public restrooms and a multi-purpose shade structure on the east side of the Square. The primary stage for performances under The Sails on the Square remains intact.

This urban trail system and downtown renovation have already been catalysts for economic development in Hickory, attracting business, visitors, and residents seeking a well-crafted community.

The City of Conover's Pedestrian Bicycle and Streetscape Project has been a cornerstone of downtown revitalization efforts and has already made a big impact on the community. The streetscape project has provided a new urban focus with new trees, crosswalks, and planted medians.

Since the completion of the project several new businesses have opened or expanded, providing new reasons to visit and spend time downtown. The district is now walkable and has new bike facilities so movement through the area is enhanced. The streetscape project has improved the appearance of the entire downtown area and supports the businesses by providing a well-designed backdrop for commerce.

As the focus of revitalization efforts in downtown and the neighboring Conover Station, the project has linked the central business district with the surrounding community. The result now is an area conducive to walking, shopping and conducting business. Public facilities such as the NC Works office, the Newton Conover Library, City Park, Downtown Park and the Conover Community Room are all more accessible because of the project.

The Conover City Park Expansion includes a multiuse, outdoor amphitheater expanding opportunities for live music in downtown Conover. In addition to the amphitheater, there is a new larger playground, walking paths, and a location for the Charters of Freedom display, etched bronze replicas of the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

The Newton Streetscape Revitalization Project has progressed into a citywide effort to build on Newton's brilliant legacy by planning for a bright future of growth and

success not just in downtown Newton, but throughout the entire community.

Each phase of the Newton Streetscape Revitalization Project includes replacing outdated underground utilities and infrastructure, such as water and sewer lines, electric lines, fiber lines and cable lines. Above ground improvements include newly paved travel lanes, bike lanes, and parking; widened paver sidewalks; decorative lights and poles; street trees; benches; and trash and recycle bins.

The first phase included the addition of the Frank & Sue Jones

Amphitheatre across from the 1924 Courthouse, which is the perfect setting for outdoor concerts and performances. As part of the second phase of construction, Yount Park was significantly enhanced. The park was doubled in size to allow for a new performance space and greater accessibility. New landscaping and pavers make the space more inviting to residents and visitors.

By focusing on the heart of the city, people in Newton and surrounding communities have begun to take notice, visit, shop, dine, and take renewed pride in the community.



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CATAWBA COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA



#1

lowest business costs in the US
(Source: Forbes.com)

2.5%

NC Corporate Income Tax

6th

most affordable city in the US to start a business
(Source: Inc. Magazine)

88

US cost of living index
(Source: BestPlaces.net)



<1hr

from Charlotte Douglas International Airport

700+

daily departures with **36** international destinations with direct flights to Paris, Frankfurt, Munich, and London

60%

of the US population within a one-day drive

3

interstates immediately accessible (I-40, I-85, I-77)



28%

of the workforce employed in manufacturing

425

manufacturers in Catawba County alone with nearly **25,000** workers

395,000

person labor force within a 45-minute drive with total population of **779,000**

<1%

unionization rate



4

higher education institutions

#3

community college in the US, Catawba Valley Community College
(Source: SmartAsset.com)

\$26m

80,400 s.f. Workforce Solutions Complex housing robotics, mechatronics, computer-integrated machining, and more

23

colleges and universities within 50 miles

CRITICAL & ESSENTIAL INDUSTRY SUPPORT INITIATIVE

Target Industries

- Pharmaceuticals
- Medical Devices & Testing Equipment
- Medical Supplies
- Testing Labs
- Critical R&D
- Battery Manufacturing
- Logistics
- Information & Data Storage
- Critical Food & Consumer Products
- Advanced Textiles and NonWovens
- Others Sectors as Determined

Target Incentive Grants

- **For Qualifying Industry Sectors**, Additional Incentives will be awarded to the standard Incentives Matrix, resulting in increased percentage and/or term
- **Building Permits Process** may be expedited; 5-day inspections possible
- **Worker Training & Product Development Assistance** via unique Workforce Solutions Center, K-64 Initiative, and Manufacturing Solutions Center programs





THINK YOU KNOW HICKORY? THINK AGAIN.



Named one of the Best Small Cities in America by National Geographic Travel in 2018, Hickory is not only known for its furniture-industry roots but is also home to a variety of corporate headquarters. Hickory is a haven for anyone interested in crafting a good life for themselves, their community, and future generations.

Businesses are locating here, people are moving here, and if being ranked 16th in the state for tourism is any indicator, visitors are flocking here, too. Make a living and make a life in Hickory, Catawba County – the hub of the Greater Hickory Metro. Come get to know us – again.

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