



PROVIDED BY HICKORY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

Hollar Hosiery Mill in Hickory, built in the 1930s, sat empty for years. A three-year renovation, complete in 2013, transformed it to include a farm-to-table restaurant and event space. It's representative of a movement across Catawba County: building a bright future on a strong past.

Future focused

Catawba County is looking forward thanks to workforce-development programs and retrofits of its manufacturing past.

Catawba County commissioners face a big challenge. Demographic surveys predict the county will lose school-aged residents and prime-aged workers over the next 20 years. For a county with a population of about 156,000 in July 2015, that attrition will be significant, says Garrett Hinshaw, president of Hickory-based Catawba Valley Community College. Commissioners asked him and other school and

business leaders to develop a plan to keep those worrisome projections from becoming reality. Their response was K-64.

The workforce-development plan's name reflects a worker's lifespan, from kindergarten to retirement age. "Although we've been talking as a county about workforce issues for years, there has never been a concerted effort [to address them]," Hinshaw says. "The vision for this initiative is that we begin early — hence the 'K' — identifying talent to



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PROVIDED BY CATAWBA EDC

When they couldn't find workers, five furniture manufacturers joined local organizations and Catawba Valley Community College to establish the Furniture Academy to train their own.



PROVIDED BY CATAWBA VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Catawba Valley Community College's Manufacturing Academy was born from the same mold as its Furniture Academy, but it supports manufacturers in various industries.

get students interested in the jobs offered by our local companies.” Its premise is expansive, too. K-64 will assemble resources to train young county residents and retrain experienced or displaced workers for well-paying jobs available locally, so they don't feel the need to leave. That training will result in two- and four-year degrees and technical credentials.

K-64 will start by integrating more technology in schools, so every student has access to a computer or digital device such as a tablet. Their education will include more character development and leadership skills. Teachers will be shown how to incorporate technology into lesson plans. Work-based learning will be a priority. Internships and job shadowing will be arranged for students, and local employers will be invited to schools. The latter will spur employer engagement, helping schools, colleges and universities quickly react to changing workforce needs. The plan also will help midcareer or displaced workers access locally available retraining or education opportunities and industry credentials.

Catawba County, its municipalities and three school districts, local chambers of commerce and businesses, and CVCC will pull together to make K-64 work. Hinshaw estimates it will cost about \$4 million a year, and the plan is awaiting seed money from commissioners. “This whole community is really getting focused on the things we need to address to set us apart [from other communities] in terms of talent development.”

Catawba County was established in 1842, when agriculture was its main industry. That changed in 1902, when furniture-maker Hickory White opened. Now known as Hickory Springs Manufacturing Co., it's the country's oldest furniture manufacturer operating at its original site. Others followed, and after World War II, as much as 60% of U.S. furniture was made within 200 miles of Catawba County. But as the decades passed, manufacturers began moving production overseas, where lower costs, including labor, helped raise their profits. The trend is starting to work in reverse. Rising wages in Southeast Asia, advances in manufactur-

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For the fifth consecutive year, Catawba Valley Medical Center has been named a recipient of the Women's Choice Award as one of *America's 100 Best Hospitals for Patient Experience*. Also, for the fifth consecutive year, a recipient of *America's Best Hospitals for Obstetrics*. This Women's Choice Award identifies the nation's best healthcare institutions measured against the needs and preferences of women, providing her the opportunity to identify which hospitals deliver the quality patient experience she seeks for her and her family, and for her birthing experience.

These credentials signify Catawba Valley Medical Center's commitment and passion towards an extraordinary healthcare experience for all patients, and are further examples of the many ways we're working to improve the health of our community.



ing technology, higher delivery costs and consumer demand for better quality items have pushed some manufacturers to reshore production.

Manufacturing never completely left Catawba County. In fact, new companies arrived. Today, between 40% and 60% of the world's fiber optics, for example, are made in Catawba County. The factories, including those that make furniture, are much different than those of just a few decades ago. Dirt, noise and back-breaking labor

have been replaced with cleanrooms, gently humming computers and push-button technology. That requires a new workforce and a new attitude about manufacturing careers. K-64 is just one effort to build both. Furniture Academy is a second.

CVCC opened Furniture Academy in 2014 with assistance from Hickory-based Century Furniture LLC, Conover-based LEE Industries Inc., High Point-based Lexington Home Brands LLC, Hickory-based Sherrill Furniture Co., Conover-based Vanguard

Furniture Co. and several community organizations. It was their answer to developing the skilled workers the companies need but can't find. It has trained about 35 students each year.

To meet increased demand, CVCC opened a second Furniture Academy campus in Taylorsville in July. And in December 2016, the original Furniture Academy moved to a 38,000-square-foot building on Newton's Locust Street that once housed the Old Hickory Tannery. The waiting list for enrollment had expanded to several hundred, more than could be trained in the original 6,000-square-foot space on CVCC's main campus.

Furniture Academy students study seven specific skill sets: manual cutting, automated cutting, pattern making, sewing, spring-up, inside upholstery and outside upholstery. Bill McBrayer is human resources manager at Lexington Home Brands, which has operations in Hickory, and serves on the State Board of Community Colleges. He lauds the expanded program. "Instead of having a limited number of students being able to come through and get educated and trained, we're expanding that by 20 or more and maybe get a hundred people out here and get them trained," he told the *Hickory Record* during the ribbon-cutting ceremony in Newton.

Like the Furniture Academy, CVCC's Manufacturing Academy uses support and input from local companies, but these aren't limited to the furniture industry. It introduces students to basic manufacturing concepts through a 42-hour overview and modules in problem solving; math and measurements; teamwork and communication; safety introduction; lean and continuous improvement; total quality management; Six Sigma and ISO certifications. Students who complete this program are fast-tracked for open positions with 25 sponsoring companies.

The roles played by the Furniture and Manufacturing academies go beyond filling the estimated 3,100 manufacturing jobs that are currently available in Catawba County, says Conover City Manager Donald Duncan. Today's manufacturing processes



PROVIDED BY CATAWBA EDC

Catawba Valley Community College broke ground on its Workforce Solutions complex in November 2016. Students will learn advanced-manufacturing skills in high-tech labs.



PROVIDED BY CATAWBA EDC

Conover Station was developed on the site of a former furniture factory. It is home to a library, meeting space and the Manufacturing Solutions Center, which has more than 1,100 clients.



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PROVIDED BY CATAWBA VALLEY MEDICAL CENTER

Hickory-based Catawba Valley Medical Center is the region's largest not-for-profit public health-care system. It earned an A ranking for safety from national patient watchdog The Leapfrog Group, based in Washington, D.C., in December 2016. Only 844 of more than 26,000 U.S. hospitals received that grade.

are high-tech, even in traditional industries such as furniture and textiles. They require workers who can think on their feet, solve problems and adapt to changes. "We don't need more people with four-year degrees," he says. "We need skilled craftsmen who can perform multiple roles because factories are now so productive they can operate with one-fifth of the workforce they used to." Colleges are adding high-tech classrooms, too, to teach just that.

CVCC invested years of planning and collaborated with the county's three public school systems to design the \$25 million 83,000-square-foot Workforce Solutions Complex. Advanced manufacturing and other technical skills will be taught in its state-of-the-art classrooms and laboratories. "Manufacturers that survived the recession are now heavily tech-based and rely on a skilled workforce to operate that technology," Hinshaw says. "CVCC's new

Workforce Solutions Complex will ensure a future pipeline of talent for high-tech jobs, making our area even more attractive to new and expanding industry." Ground was broken in November 2016 for the building, which will house technology and engineering programs, including Computer Engineering Technology, Electrical Engineering Technology, Computer Integrated Machining, Electronics Engineering Technology, Automotive Systems Technology, Welding, Mechanical Engineering Technology, Mechatronics and Robotics, and Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning.

While these efforts focus on assembling a skilled workforce, CVCC's Manufacturing Solutions Center serves as a technical and supply-chain resource for companies, from one-person startups to 100-year-old manufacturers. It creates and maintains jobs through training, develop-

ing prototypes, applying research and offering other related services.

It began as Hosiery Technology Center of North Carolina at the behest of the state's hosiery manufacturers in 1990, says Dan St. Louis, who helped found the center and directs its current incarnation. Its name changed in 2010 to reflect the diversity of industries it has come to serve. It works with local companies and ones from nearly every state and a half-dozen countries. St. Louis says the center's more than 1,100 customers include many Fortune 100 companies. Its testing lab is one of its biggest draws. Sourcing is another favorite service. "We actively source U.S. manufacturers to people who call the center daily looking for product from all over the world." The center, which opened in 2012, houses one of the region's largest manufacturing incubators and offers entrepreneur-development programs. In the last four years, the center has helped create



Conover Station is an active downtown Brownfield redevelopment project located in the heart of Conover. The land offered in the redevelopment area has small town charm while offering big city amenities, and since its inception Conover Station has received resounding community and political support. Conover Station has become a prominent, newsworthy project that provides a sound example of successful community-based redevelopment. The City of Conover is working on stimulating economic growth and encouraging sustainable downtown redevelopment.



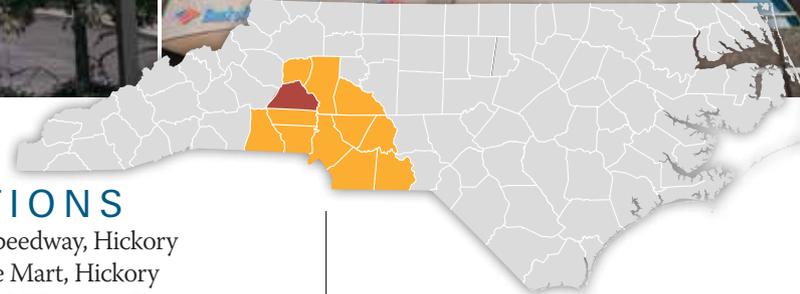
The ncDataCampus is a 55-acre business park designed for data centers and office use. The site has been designated AT&T Fiber Ready. The park is controlled by the Catawba County EDC and is ideal for a corporate campus. It can be configured for one-user, or for three 15-20 acre users. The site is located outside of any flight paths and more than 2 miles from rail. Dual service fiber optics are available from multiple providers. A Duke Energy substation is on-site with an additional substation within 1.5 miles. 100kV dual circuit and 44kV single circuit lines are adjacent to the site. Redundant water service is available from the City of Conover with a current capacity of 3.0 mgd. The site is conveniently located less than 1 mile from I-40 and 45 minutes from the Charlotte Douglas International Airport.



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A REGIONAL VIEW



Catawba County is part of the Charlotte region, named for the state's largest city. It is home to professional sports, including the NFL's Carolina Panthers, minor-league sports and first-class museums and centers. The Catawba River runs through the region. Lake Hickory forms Catawba County's northern border before flowing into Lake Norman, the largest body of water within the state. The river and its lakes are favorites for kayakers and boaters.

ATTRACTIONS

- Hickory Motor Speedway, Hickory
- Hickory Furniture Mart, Hickory
- Carolina Panthers NFL team, Charlotte
- The Hickory Crawdads minor league baseball, Hickory
- Hickory Aviation Museum, Hickory
- Carowinds amusement park, Charlotte

EVENTS

- Carolina Renaissance Festival, Huntersville, October-November
- Hickory Hops Brewer's Festival, April
- Swinging Under the Stars Concert, Hickory, May
- Carolina BalloonFest, Statesville, October
- Rural Hill Scottish Festival and Loch Norman Games, Huntersville, April
- Christmas Town USA, McAdenville, December

COUNTIES

Alexander, Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union

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- Automotive manufacturing

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PROVIDED BY MORETZ MILLS

Moretz Mills has been renovated into 83,000 square feet of mixed-use space. It's home to Blue Bloodhound, whose software connects motor carriers and truck drivers to move freight.



PROVIDED BY CATAWBA EDC

Hickory-based Transportation Insight LLC is renovating Lyerly Mill as its headquarters. Work includes adding a gym, basketball court and athletic field, nods to its young workforce.

almost 400 jobs and retained almost 300 more. It's all done from the site of a former mill in the heart of Conover.

Lenoir-based Broyhill Furniture Industries Inc. closed the 316,542-square-foot factory, which had employed as many as 400, in 2004. Conover purchased the 27-acre site in 2005, razing most of it and renaming it Conover Station. The oldest building on the site, the former Warlong Glove Manufacturing plant, was saved, renovated and now houses a branch of the Catawba County Library and community meeting space. There is an environmental education park, and several sites served by water, sewer, redundant power, natural gas and fiber optics are ripe for development. The city has secured almost \$7 million in grants for the project, which sits at the center of a well-connected Catawba County. It is within a one-day drive of 60% of the U.S. population and an hour from Charlotte, the state's largest city and home to an international airport and an intermodal yard.

Locating the high-profile Manufacturing Solutions Center in a brownfield — a former manufacturing and industrial site that can be difficult to redevelop because of existing environmental conditions — isn't a one-time deal in Catawba County. Hickory's Planning and Development Services Director Brian Frazier says more than two dozen public-private redevelopment projects are underway in the city. Investors, with the help of local and federal grants, have put more than \$30 million into transforming former mills, factories and gas stations into mixed-use developments, housing, offices, restaurants, meeting spaces, fitness centers, shops and government offices. He calls it a "renaissance," a term that could easily apply to Catawba County. The projects and programs all involve cooperation at the local and state levels, leveraging the region's past to ensure its future by creating trendy places where people want to work and live.

Moretz Mills is one of the biggest projects. Its 83,000 square feet of mixed-use space is home to a spa, restaurant, event space and logistics company Blue Bloodhound, a division of Davidson-based The Greene Group LLC. Its software connects

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Companies invested almost \$200 million in 2016

Catawba County invested in itself in 2016, and so did companies. Eleven across several sectors announced investments that total \$199.6 million. They will create 490 jobs. Here are four of the largest.

GKN Driveline

The division of United Kingdom-based GKN PLC announced in December that it is expanding its Maiden factory. The \$110 million investment is expected to create 143 jobs by the end of 2019. The added production will help meet North American automakers' demand for all-wheel-drive and electric-vehicle parts. It's not the first time GKN has expanded here. It invested \$122 million and created 228 jobs in 2014.

Corning Inc.

The Corning, N.Y.-based company has had a plant in Hickory for more than 30 years. It will invest at least \$30 million to expand optical-cable production and create 105 jobs over the next five years. The average annual salary of those jobs will be \$58,000. The average annual wage in the county was \$38,240 in 2015. The increased output will help meet demand from data-center builds and wireless-network expansions worldwide.

Prysmian Group

The Italy-based maker of cable for the energy and telecommunications industries is spending \$20 million to expand its factory in Claremont and create 50 jobs within three years. Their average annual salary will be about \$47,000. The jobs will be for hourly production workers, hourly technicians and salaried managers and engineers. Prysmian's expansion will restore some operations that were discontinued in 2003.

Dynamic Air Engineering Inc.

Claremont International Business Park will be the new home for this manufacturer, which engineers products for the aviation and defense industries. DAE is investing at least \$7.2 million to move its headquarters, research and development, and manufacturing from California. It will create 53 jobs within five years.



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motor carriers with pay-by-the-run local and long hauls with qualified drivers looking for work. Scott Millar, Catawba County Economic Development Corp. president, describes it as, "Uber meets the trucking industry."

A company that catered a recent women's leadership conference for 300 at Moretz Mills is built around a historic landmark. Rock Barn Country Club and Spa, a 1,000-acre golf-course community in Conover named after a circa-1800s structure on the property, recently launched an outside catering division, says General Manager Brad Ellinger. Rock Barn also has 485 residences, two signature championship courses and an equestrian center. It hosts about 500 events annually. In a nod to sustainability, the 180-employee company, which is owned by businessman Don Beaver, who also owns the minor-league baseball team Hickory Crawdads, recently opened a 5.25-megawatt solar farm in partnership with Ohio-based Melink Corp. The array has 16,948 solar panels on 28 acres. The system is expected to generate



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more than 7.3 million kilowatt hours of clean energy — enough electricity to serve 500 homes for one year — in its first year. All of the electricity produced by the solar farm will be sold to Charlotte-based Duke Energy Corp., the nation's largest utility.

A second Hickory redevelopment is Lyerly Mill, which is owned by Hickory-based Transportation Insight LLC, a 20-year-old home-grown third-party logistics provider owned by Hickory-based OHM Holdings

LLC. The company has been named to the Inc. 5000 list of fastest-growing privately held companies in North America for six consecutive years. It was one of the largest privately held companies in North Carolina in 2016, and it expects its workforce to expand to between 300 and 400 in the next few years.

Supported in part by a brownfield remediation grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, the company renovated

the mill — the region's only surviving two-story one from the early 1900s — to include 70,000 square feet of office space. Phase 2 of the Transportation Insight corporate campus includes building a gym, basketball court and athletic field. These amenities will be appreciated by its young workforce. The mill's proximity to downtown and the development of a live-work-play community also factored heavily in the company's decision to locate its headquarters there. "Many young adults today no longer value suburban living and instead are seeking a downtown work-life experience within a revitalized, livable community where associates can experience daily outdoor living and recreation programs," said Paul Thompson, the company's founder and chairman, in a statement.

Hickory is home to Lenoir-Rhyne University, a private liberal-arts institution that enrolls about 2,300 students. It has been connected to the community for more than 125 years. The proposed CityWalk, which will be developed along Main Avenue, will strengthen that tie. It will enable pedestrian-friendly "commuting" between the main campus — the university also has ones in Asheville and Columbia, S.C. — and downtown. Along its path are shops, restaurants and businesses. The project will be built using bonds approved by city voters over the last few years, Frazier says. Construction bids are scheduled to go out in November, and construction should begin early next year.

Lenoir-Rhyne University also has committed to locating its new health-sciences center on Lenoir-Rhyne Boulevard in downtown Hickory. Its centerpiece is the university's physician assistant program, a two and a half year master's-level course that will accept its second class of approximately 50 students this year. The program employs six full-time faculty and staff. The center also consolidates the university's undergraduate and graduate-level health care programs and positions the county as a premier health care career center, working in cooperation with the county's current medical and training assets including CVCC's registered-nurse program and local medical providers such

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as Catawba Valley Medical Center and Frye Regional Medical Center, says Peter Kendall, the university's senior vice president of administration and finance. The university is considering additional degree programs, including doctor of optometry, doctor of pharmacy and doctor of osteopathy.

The partnership with Lenoir-Rhyne joins several developments at 355-bed Frye Regional over the last year. It became part of Duke LifePoint Health in January 2016. It's a partnership between Durham-based Duke University Health Care Inc. and Brentwood, Tenn.-based LifePoint Health that was launched in 2011. It helps community hospitals and regional medical centers recruit and retain physicians and offer better care. The addition of Frye brings its roster to 14 hospitals in four states, from North Carolina's Foothills to Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Frye's Heart Center offers the widest array of cardiac and vascular services in Catawba, Caldwell, Burke and Alexander counties — commonly referred to as The Unifour — and the only hospital with 24/7 interventional cardiology and open-heart surgery within 48 miles of Hickory. It added one more layer of care in October 2016 when it joined the Duke Heart Network and became its only western North Carolina affiliate. It provides more access to the clinical experience and expertise of Duke Heart Center, which *U.S. News & World Report* ranked fifth in the nation for adult cardiology and heart surgery in 2016. It also gives Frye doctors and staff access to the latest training and education, Duke guidelines and heart-care research.

Frye CEO Gar Atchison says joining forces with Duke is a natural next step for the medical center. "Our cardiovascular center is growing to serve our region, and we'll work closely with Duke Health to gain its expertise on new procedures, protocols for care and services that Frye can provide so our community can continue receiving care close to home for complex heart conditions." ■

— Suzanne Wood is a freelance writer from the Triangle.

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