



Darlington County
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP



SEASON'S
GREETINGS



Project Beacon IX announcement

After the third reading of the Project Beacon IX ordinance reading on Oct. 5, 2015 at the Darlington County Council meeting, Cypress Creek Renewables was announced as the company behind the project. Cypress Creek Renewables from Carrboro, North Carolina will be investing \$10 million into a solar farm in Darlington County along with several other solar farms in neighboring counties. Cypress Creek Renewables has developed a standardized approach to design high quality utility scale

projects using clean energy.

"We are thrilled with this opportunity to bring a stable, clean source of energy to Darlington County. Cypress is making the investment in this project because we believe in the value of our partnership with this community" Cypress Creek Renewables CEO Matthew McGovern said.

The cost of solar energy has fallen dramatically over the past few years and power companies including Duke - Progress Energy have partnered with solar companies to expand the use of clean energy generation to the grid. This project in Darlington County by Cypress Creek will supply power to the Duke grid.

"Cypress Creek Renewables' investment in solar power in Darlington County is consistent with our commitment to environmentally clean growth. Positive economic opportunity, sustainable energy and a clean environment is a winning combination" Darlington County Economic Development Partnership Executive Director Frank Willis said.

The 65-acre solar facility will generate 10 megawatts of electricity and create 40-60

jobs during construction. The facility is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2016. Ten megawatts of solar energy is enough to provide energy to approximately 2,000 South Carolina homes. As part of ordinance 15-28, Project Beacon IX was approved for a fee in lieu of taxation based on the increase of the taxation value of agricultural land to industrial land. The net tax revenue growth to the county will be over \$90,000 annually once the facility is operational.

Darlington County Progress' Annual Meeting

Darlington County Progress, Inc. met for their annual meeting and reception on Thursday, Oct. 29, 2015 at the Darlington Country Club and welcomed the S.C. Speaker of the House of Representatives, Jay Lucas, as the guest speaker.



"Darlington County reached a new milestone in economic development with the announcement of the Darlington County Foundation Technical Park being named a South Carolina Certified Industrial Park by the Department of Commerce," Chairman John Kimbrough said. He reported that the construction of the \$12 million research and development facility at the Sonoco plant in Hartsville and the completion of infrastructure work at the I-20 Industrial Park were further proof of how far the county has come. "Darlington County is work ready," Kimbrough said. "Members, we are all proud of Darlington's certification and recommendation as having a highly skilled workforce, which you know is the key ingredient to successful development." He added that the successful membership drive last year made more funds available to the Darlington County Economic Development Partnership to use for advertising and attracting new industry to the county.

As Speaker of the South Carolina House of Representatives, Jay Lucas, took the podium, he received applause from the Progress members. "I can tell you my first year is one I wouldn't wish on anyone," Lucas said, referring to the recent events including the tragic shooting at the Charleston church, subsequent removal of the Confederate flag from the statehouse grounds, and the widespread flooding. "But problems and challenges like this bring great opportunities to this area. I truly believe that over next year, we will have a road-funding bill passed in South Carolina and our roads will look like North Carolina's and Georgia's and we'll have orange cones everywhere instead of the conditions we have now. I do believe we will pass an ethics reform in South Carolina next year and in dealing with the Abbeville decision, will pass education reform that will not only make our children college ready but career ready to walk out and take these manufacturing jobs that come to South Carolina."

Darlington County Council Chairman Bobby Hudson thanked Progress "for the role that the private sector plays in the economic development of Darlington County. County Council is 100 percent behind the work that Frank Willis, our executive director, and his staff do to facilitate economic growth within the county, but private sector support is still greatly needed." He noted that "Recent successes in nearby counties will present opportunities for related businesses to locate here too, and it's the support of Progress that could tip the scales and help Darlington County land that next prospect."

The new chair for 2016 is Jack Roach of Florence Darlington Technical College. New board members elected included: Johnna Shirley of Coker College, Quinetta Buterbaugh of the Hartsville Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Eddie Ingram, Superintendent of the Darlington County School District, Danny Johnson of North Industrial Machine, Pat Godbold of McLeod Health and Will Johnson of Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd.



The Gould Business Incubator reaches full occupancy

As the home of Darlington County Economic Development, the positive changes over the past year have been obvious at the Gould Business Incubator at Florence-Darlington Technical College. Since the new Incubator manager, Ashley Dingle, started last November, occupancy has increased from 23 percent to 100 percent. The twenty-four businesses that call the Incubator home include 42 percent minority-owned, 25 percent veteran-owned and 17 percent women-owned companies. The Incubator's new companies generated over \$12 million dollars in total combined gross revenue from 2014 to 2015, so the investment is paying big dividends.

"The mission of the Gould Business Incubator is to help businesses get off the ground with an advantage by providing access to all of the resources that are needed during the critical startup phase. We want to decrease the rate of small business failure and assist with manufacturing operations by reducing their overhead costs and by offering an ideal space in which to operate machinery," Ashley Dingle, Manager of the Gould Business Incubator stated.

One of the most appealing advantages for a manufacturer or product engineer to work here is the flexible work spaces that are available. From fully furnished offices to 1000 square foot manufacturing areas, the Gould Business Incubator has space that is ideally designed to meet the growing company's needs and to reduce their costs. FDTC works with the new clients by outfitting the manufacturing spaces with electrical power and plumbing installations to meet the client company's specs.

The newest addition to the Incubator is the first Makerspace in the Florence-Darlington area. The GBI Makerspace is home to eleven 3D printers. Inventors, entrepreneurs and students can design prototypes and have models printed for a reasonable membership fee. 3D printing allows businesses to test designs on a smaller scale at a cost effective price that can reduce down-time when products go to full scale production. Monthly memberships to the Makerspace are \$25.00 and workshop classes will be \$10.00 per student.

"A business incubator is designed to reduce the risk of failure for new businesses, but the goal of the Gould Business Incubator is to not only reduce that failure rate, but to encourage creation of new technologies and to gain direct access to lean manufacturing processes," Dingle said. Being located next to the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology helps the member companies of the incubator to develop working relationships with the staff of the SIMT and gives the entrepreneur a more hands-on approach to the development of their product. With the combination of resources, education and professional staff to support the growing company, it is the ideal environment to contribute to the development and retention of great companies in the region.

The Gould Business Incubator is still accepting applications even though it is currently out of space and will place interested businesses on a waiting list. Contact Ashley Dingle at 843-413-2755 for more information about the incubator and GBI Makerspace membership.



Weather impacts on Darlington County Industries

The historic floods of October 2015 hit South Carolina hard and the effects will be felt for months to come. While Darlington County had limited damage compared to neighboring counties, the agriculture industry continues to be among the hardest hit. After the extremely hot and dry summer, the heavy rains coming at harvest time have decimated most local crops.

Peanuts, soybeans and cotton that had barely survived the drought are succumbing to the wet field conditions that have persisted for the past two months. The corn crop had already been devastated by the persistent drought this summer and farmers were hoping for better yields from their remaining crops. According to the USDA Ag Statistics Service, peanuts, soybeans and cotton crops were rated in poor or very poor condition for nearly 50 percent of the crop in the Oct. 18, 2015 weekly report. The continued wet weather has caused delays in the planting of winter grains too. Local businesses that rely on the timely harvest of crops have also been negatively affected including grain elevators and buying stations.

On the brighter side, the manufacturing sector of Darlington County has fared much better. Executive Director of Darlington County Economic Development, Frank Willis, assisted the county's emergency management team by checking on local industry in the days following the floods. Willis reported no significant damage to local manufacturing was caused by the flooding. Employers reported several missed shifts due to road delays and travel concerns for their workforce, but no major damage to the plants. Willis expressed thanks to the local business community for their hard work and cooperation keeping the county informed during the difficult times.

2016 Membership Reminder

On Oct. 1, 2015, pledge cards were emailed out to Progress Members and potential members. The pledge cards were due back to our office by the end of October. Beginning Jan. 1, 2016, Progress Board Members will start reaching out to members and potential members who haven't returned their pledge cards. Invoices for 2016 dues were emailed to existing members last week. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please feel free to contact our office.