Area soars in economic development rankings

Seneca area named No. 1 micropolitan in state, in top 10 nationally

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
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WALHALLA — Seneca emerged as the top performing micropolitan area in South Carolina this year and cracked the top 10 nationwide list on the strength of more than $57 million in investments from seven economic development projects announced in 2014.

The surge by the Seneca micropolitan area in the rankings compiled by Site Selection magazine was announced Tuesday by Oconee Economic Alliance officials.



Buddin

A micropolitan area is defined as having a population in its urban core of at least 10,000 and not more than 50,000. The Seneca MA encompasses all of Oconee County.

Glenn Buddin, chairman of the Oconee Economic Alliance and a top executive of Blue Ridge Bank, called the Site Selection magazine rankings "exciting news" for the county.

"We must continue to do everything possible to keep our momentum toward creating more jobs and opportunities for the citizens of Oconee County," Buddin said in a statement released by OEA.

In 2014, Oconee County recruited two new companies — Plastic Products Co. and ACI Plastics —

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RANKINGS: Seneca tied for eighth in US

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and announced additional investments from expansion plans at U.S. Engine Valve, BorgWarner, Greenfield Industries/TDC, Heli-Basket and Sandvik. All the ventures combined to produce 309 new jobs and investments of $57.1 million in 2014.

OEA executive director Richard Blackwell said the new jobs announced in 2014 accounted for more jobs in the county than the previous four years combined.

"This ranking is a testament to the strength of our county, the partnerships in place and the support of economic development in our area," Blackwell said.

The Seneca micropolitan area ranked 45th in the country in 2013 and moved up to the 27th spot of Site Selection's rankings in 2014. Results are based on the number of economic development projects in the area.

Ohio had four micropolitan areas ranked in the top 10 by Site Selection, including No. 1 Findlay, Ohio, which posted 20 projects.

The Seneca MA was tied for the eighth spot with three other localities — Dyersburg, Tenn., Ogdensburg-Massena, N.Y., and Plattsburg, N.Y.

Other micropolitan areas in South Carolina ranked by Site Selection are Gaffney and Orangeburg (tied for 42nd), and Greenwood, which tied for the 74th spot.

Site Selection magazine is an internationally circulated trade publication covering corporate real estate and economic development that is used by corporate executives, facility planners and site selectors to make strategic decisions.

Although 2014 will be a tough act to follow, that's not going to keep Blackwell from trying.

"There is always more to do in bringing both more jobs to the area and new opportunities for the citizens of this wonderful community," Blackwell said.



FILE

Work began at the site of the new TDC Cutting Tools Inc. overseas campus at the intersection of Davis Creek Road and U.S. Highway 123 near Seneca in October. The expansion was one of several that helped the area become the top ranking micropolitan area in the state and crack the top 10 nationally.

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