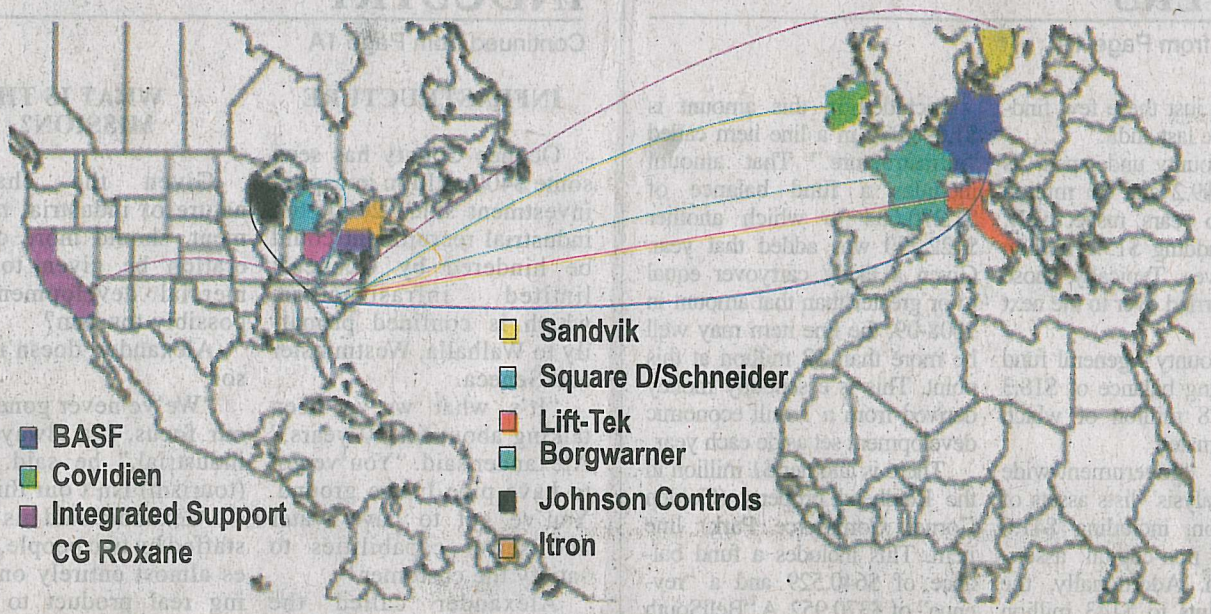
Crossroads

'We've never gone off of our focus, it's always been industrial.'

— Economic Development Director Jim Alexander

Oconee vs. the world for industry

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This graphic represents the headquarters of only a portion of the industrial firms in Oconee County.

This isn't your grandfather's onee County.

While the Golden Corner may a rural and still largely unde-loped area, the industrial base as is filled with companies run foreign entities or out-of-state erests — and the battle to bring more of them is a global con-ntation.

The late Bob Gaillard, former lustry czar for the county, has en heralded for bringing in indus-giants like Johnson Controls, S. Engine Valve and Valenite. He ired in 1999 just as the face of lustrial recruitment was begin-g to change. While Gaillard s not a total stranger to selling onee County to foreign compa-s, dealing and competing with rest of the world is now the m, not the exception.

"The county was really grow-a lot at the time. In general, rything in the South was, and still had textiles as a base ustry," Steve Moore, former onee County councilman, said. ut businesses began to evolve m textiles into other industries t weren't wool and dye."

The past decade has witnessed rnational businesses setting up p in Oconee County and also ing control of pre-existing com-ies. Today the mountain lakes a has a decided international or.

BASF Catalysts has German ts. Lift-Tek can be traced to y. Sandvik, which absorbed enite, in 2003, is based in eden. Schneider Electric, which k over Square D, is a French n. Even companies in Oconee nty that are based within the ited States are foreign in the th. ITech South hails from New k City, and Johnson Controls has its roots in Wisconsin.

The inevitable rise of globalization doesn't make things any easier for current Economic Development Commission (EDC) Director Jim Alexander.

Where Oconee County used to attract smaller regional operations through tax breaks and various incentives offered elsewhere in the Palmetto State, Alexander is now having to interface with multiple levels of corporate leadership to even gain a shot at reeling in a company.

"Gaillard was competing with North Carolina and Georgia, maybe Florida and Alabama," Moore said. "Alexander is competing with Beijing, China."

Alexander said nearly every company Oconee County tries to recruit now is also being recruited by another country, like Russia, China, Mexico and the Philippines.

When BorgWarner received a special project to begin producing transfer cases for General Motors' trucks, the company's Seneca location beat out locations in Indiana and Mexico to move forward with a $10 million expansion.

Globalization means more competition. In many cases, it means competing with a foreign labor pool willing to work for cheap.

In the face of that challenge, Alexander said the key to recruitment is to have real product, such as spec buildings and infrastructure, to show local representatives of international business players.

"You only have a chance to influence the home office very indirectly," Alexander said. "We have to constantly be in contact with the local folks who in turn go back to their headquarters on a regular basis and let them know what we're doing or trying to do. So it's important to keep that communication open at the local level."

The EDC strives to cope with an ever-expanding market. Its Web site is currently available in German and Chinese. A Spanish translation is also planned.

The EDC is currently actively recruiting two companies to the area and working on another possible expansion — in all cases, international competition is present.

"You name a company here and most of them have some tie to a foreign company. You're not just working U.S. companies anymore," Alexander said.

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Saturday

The Golden Corner Commerce Park: Can the 'hay field' become our industrial Nirvana or is it better suited for something else? What are the options?

