

Expansion boosts Pickens

Project Lighting the sixth company to plan investment

By Anna Simon

Clemson bureau

asimon@greenvilleonline.com

PICKENS — Project Lighting is the code name for an existing, longtime Pickens County industry that is planning a \$2.5 million expansion.

It is the sixth company in a parade of recent an-

nouncements of new jobs and investment in Pickens County.

Already five new or expanding industries announced a total of 647 jobs and a \$26.44 million investment in the county in the past five months, said Chap Hurst, county administrator.

Project Lighting, which

received approval of the first of three votes from the County Council on a fee in lieu agreement, is poised to add another success to what Hurst called "the best year in the history of Pickens County" in terms of economic development.

The Project Lighting expansion will create 5-10 jobs, said Ray Farley, executive director of Alliance Pickens. Farley declined to release further details on the company or its current location in the county.

The county and Alliance Pickens have had "an enormous amount of success" in recruiting "very diverse industries" in recent months, Hurst said.

"In general there is a very intense focus by the council and the economic development board on recruitment," Hurst said. "Jobs are critical."

Growth in new and expanded industries provides income for residents and a larger tax base to fund county facilities and ser-

economy

vices, Hurst said.

That success comes after a reorganization of Alliance Pickens, a nonprofit group recruiting new industry and supporting existing ones in the county.

In wake of the reorganization, Alliance Pickens remains a nonprofit organization, but the director and staff now are county employees and two County Council members now sit on the alliance board, Hurst said.

The economic develop-

ment staff has been increased to include an additional employee dedicated to working with existing industry, Hurst said.

The board and council have developed strategies and targeted growth industries for the county, said Jennifer Willis, who is council chairwoman and represents the council on the alliance board along with council member Sam Wyche.

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Among the key targets are advanced specialty manufacturers such as The Reliable Automatic Sprinkler Co. Inc., Tri-Tech USA and VCI-SC Inc., Willis said. Reliable is the coun-

ty's largest manufacturing employer, and VCI-SC, a metal-working firm that announced plans in June to open a new facility creating 50 jobs in Pickens County. Tri-Tech relocated to the county from Vermont in 2009.

These companies "serve niche markets" and "have all differentiated

themselves from their competition," Willis said. "They are innovative, lean and creative and able to survive and thrive in this challenging economy."

Hurst said there's now more emphasis on economic development tours with Upstate Alliance and the state Department of Commerce to search for jobs.

The website has been revised and local real estate developers and the county have put together "a good, updated list of available buildings," Hurst said. Available buildings are key in attracting industry because it speeds up the time for relocation, he said.

Small-business seminars have been held for

start-ups or existing businesses. The seminars are free to county taxpayers, Hurst said. In addition, job fairs have been held to create a pool of talented, qualified workers in the county, and the county is working with Tri-County Technical College and local schools to train workers to operate equipment and new tech-

nology used in industry today.

Manufacturing is Pickens County's primary source of economic growth, employing more than 6,000 people at approximately 140 facilities in the Easley, Liberty and Pickens areas, according to the Alliance Pickens website.