# Expansion to add 300 jobs in Easley

## Company that makes parts for trucks, cars, aerospace to spend $7.3 million

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A manufacturer of components for the automotive, commercial trucking and aerospace industries said Tuesday the expansion of its operation in Pickens County will mean an investment of about $7.3 million and the creation of 300 jobs over five years.

Kongsberg Automotive will move from its location on State 183 in the Pickens area to a facility in the Easley area on Kayaker Way that housed Confluence Watersports, officials said. Confluence announced earlier this year that it was moving to the former Hitachi television tube factory along Mauldin Road in Greenville.

"Three hundred jobs is huge in today's economy and especially for Pickens County. This is a big deal,"


McKinnon

said Pickens County Council Chairwoman Jennifer Willis.

About 80 people gathered at Tri-County Technical College's Easley campus to hear the news Tuesday. It was Pickens County's fifth economic development announcement, and largest jobs announcement, since June.

"Since June of 2011, that's not even six months, we have announced 547 jobs and $26.4 million in investment, which was culminated with the announcement from Kongsberg Automotive," Willis said.

"I am very thankful that we are able to do that in today's economic climate."

Matt McKinnon, Kongsberg's plant manager, said the company needs to refit the building and in the new year will probably start to transition into it.

He said officials hope to be moved in by the end of March.

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McKinnon said they started the year with 100 employees and will go to 400 at the end of five years.

He said the company, which has a global footprint and multiple business units, considered other locations in the U.S.

"In the end, South Carolina is very pro-business — costs here are very reasonable," McKinnon said.

"We've got a very nice setup with the building, very reasonable lease rate, property tax here is very reasonable, and South Carolina is also a very good place as far as our customer base and shipping."

McKinnon said staying in Pickens County also is good for retaining employees, who have a lot of expertise.

Willis said, "We could have lost 100 jobs and an existing industry because they were landlocked in their facility, they could not operate efficiently, they could not do the things they needed to do to grow their business in the location they are in now."

But instead, the jobs aren't lost, and an industry that has been in the community for years remains, she said.

Ray Farley, executive director of Alliance Pickens, the economic development arm of Pickens County, said Tevis Machine Products started in 1989, and the company was sold to Teleflex in 1999. Kongsberg Automotive acquired the Pickens operation from Teleflex in 2007.

"Without a doubt, our little community has been blessed this year, and that came with a lot of teamwork and a lot of effort," he said.

Farley said Pickens County is fortunate to have facilities like the Easley campus of Tri-County Technical College and the Pickens County Career and Technology Center "helping to drive what's going to be our future job growth in our community."

Farley said, "Kongsberg needed a building, and it wasn't until the Bill Masters' property became available that we had a building that could handle them."

He added, "It was also a fortuitous fit because if not but for that property being vacated, we had no other existing building options for them in Pickens County. They were going to leave."

McKinnon said one reason this has come together is the work of Farley and County Administrator Chappell Hurst to find the company a home and make sure it could have a solution that made sense financially.

"You've heard about our long history, and I think the real success today and what we're proudest of is the fact that our history here is going to have a future," McKinnon said.

Willis said County Council has approved on second reading an ordinance for a fee-in-lieu-of-tax agreement and the granting of a special source revenue credit for the company, dubbed "Project Room."

Willis said the ordinance requires a third reading, which is expected in December.

She said part of the project qualifies for the fee-in-lieu-of-tax agreement, like the new equipment, but that old equipment they would be moving to the new location doesn't.

The special source credit is for the part that doesn't qualify, Willis said. She said the county will make up the difference on those portions by giving the company a tax rebate.

Under the fee-in-lieu-of-tax, the company would pay a flat annual fee on their new capital investment for 20 years instead of paying the 10.5 percent property tax rate for manufacturing, Willis said.

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Candace Moore, human resource manager for Kongsberg Automotive, said the company will create a range of jobs from manufacturing to engineering.

Moore said the pay scale will depend on the level of experience and expertise.

Company officials expect most hiring to start in January. People can apply at the Liberty One Stop starting then, Moore said.