Fewer rules, more jobs

Business friendly strategy pays off in Pickens County

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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PICKENS — Veteran machinist Jerry Revis is back working close to his home in Easley.

After being laid off in Greenville, and after a stin working in another state, Revis recently landed a job with JR Automation Technologies, LLC.

JR Automation is the maker of robotics equipment for automotive, pharmaceutical, food and general industries.

On Friday, Revis showed a visitor a robotics system that will be used to make water heaters.

"We make it to specifications and ship it out to the manufacturer," Revis said.

JR Automation selected an existing building at 1473 Walhalla Highway to locate its new sales, engineering and manufacturing facility in South Carolina. The company is investing more than $2 million and promised to create 54 high-tech jobs over the next five years.

Over the past five months, Pickens County announced the recruitment of four companies, including JR Automation, with a total investment of $19 million and a commitment to bring almost 250 jobs. County officials plan to make another major announcement next week.

Pickens County Administrator J. Chappell "Chap" Hurst said the county has found a niche that it is aggressively marking and promoting.

"We've been focusing on a certain size of industry," the veteran administrator said this week.

Hurst said his economic development team stays busy marketing existing buildings — most of them ranging in size from 40,000 to 60,000 square feet — to existing or new industries looking to expand.

"We've actively marketed these (existing) buildings," Hurst said. "We don't spend taxpayers' money building buildings. You can't get business as quickly into a new building as you can an existing building."

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JOBS: 'We don't spend taxpayers' money building buildings,' Hurst said

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Hurst said Pickens County's economic development program works under him and he insists on executing a business friendly approach. He said businesses appreciate it when you eliminate a lot of the red tape.

"Industry doesn't have a year to react, they have to produce something in months' time," Hurst said. "We cut time down. I get permits through in three days or less to get the business up and running as quickly as possible."

That business friendly attitude is paying off big time for Pickens County.

Hurst said rules are needed to keep everything orderly. However, he said too many rules are job killers.

"We're about getting things done," he said. "The more rules and regulations prevent it from happening."

Hurst said the level of success Pickens County is enjoying comes from a process of developing a strategy, which includes working with the school system to have a capable work force. He said it is something that can't be achieved overnight.

It is that type of niche development and strategy that helped attract JR Automation.

Pickens County announced the company's plans to expand here in September and less than two months later JR Automation is taking and completing work orders.

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