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Artist rendering of a facility to be built by era-contact in the Pickens County Commerce Park.

German company announces plant

Will bring 45 jobs to Pickens County

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Project Big Apple came to fruition Wednesday, with the announcement that the world's leader in high-speed railway couplings is moving its North American manufacturing headquarters to Pickens County.

County Council gave final approval to a fee-in-lieu of taxes agreement and other incentives in a special meeting at Alliance Pickens headquarters to make way for the announcement that German-based era-contact would be building a $3.6 million facility in the Pickens County Commerce Park that will create 45 jobs.

The company had been referred to as Project Big Apple in county documents to shield its identity during negotiations because it will be moving its only operation in the U.S. from New York to Pickens County.

"This world leader could have gone anywhere, but they chose Pickens County," council chairman Jennifer Willis said.

Jochen Kurz, general manager of the family-owned company, said the Pickens County School District's Career and Technology Center was one of the key selling points in the decision to locate in the park near Liberty.

"It was love at first sight," he said of his visit to the county while prospecting for a site.

The company will be needing sales people, engineers and technicians, and it expects to be recruiting students right out of the career center and training them for jobs, he said.

The 38,000-square-foot facility is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2017, he said.

The company's market in the USA is similar in size to its business in China, where it employees about 200 workers, and Kurz told *The Greenville News* he expects to have that large a workforce here eventually.

"It's always a great day in our state when we can welcome a company like era-contact USA to the South Carolina family," Gov. Nikki Haley said in a statement released by the Department of Commerce. "Their decision to create 45 new jobs in Pickens County is a huge win for the people of South Carolina and is a real reason to celebrate across the state."