'I see great things in your future'

Oconee County business, community leaders hear upbeat message

BY BRETT MCLAUGHLIN
THE JOURNAL

WESTMINSTER — Some 233 business and community leaders from across Oconee County converged on Westminster Baptist Church on Thursday for lunch and a solid dose of good news.

If Thursday's speakers — Neal Workman of Trehel Corp., Scott Vick of the Keowee River Project, Altera Polymers President Barry Rhodes, Oconee Economic Development Director Jim Alexander and Oconee Administrator Scott Moulder — were on target, Oconee is perfectly positioned for exponential growth.

Acknowledging the standing room only crowd brought together by the county's three chambers of commerce, Vick said, "The perception that none of us can get along is frustrating at best. Your presence here today proves that is wrong."

The positive growth comments by private sector developers Vick and Workman were driven home by one of the county's newest industrial players, Rhodes, who is relocating his plant operation to the former Propex building in Seneca.

"The quality of life you have here drove our

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Among the speakers at State of Oconee were, from left, Barry Rhodes of Altera Polymers; Neal Workman of Trehel Corporation; Oconee Economic Development Director Jim Alexander; and Oconee Administrator Scott Moulder.



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More than 200 people packed Westminster Baptist Church on Thursday for the State of Oconee event. Sponsored by the three Chambers of Commerce in Oconee County, the event had five speakers who discussed "Poised for Growth."

OCONEE: Poised for growth

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decision to locate here," Rhodes told the crowd.

Commenting on the cooperative chamber venture, Workman said, "You can determine what your community looks like."

Workman referred to assistance his firm received from Oconee County to secure funding for the Pointe West portion of his planned community development. He assured the crowd that no tax dollars were in jeopardy from the investment and said that the Highpointe and Pointe West projects could eventually produce up to 170 permanent jobs and generate $6 million in annual tax revenues for the county. "Oconee County is a great place to grow a company and a business," he added. "People in the public sector here realize what it takes in the private sector to create growth and jobs."

For his part, Vick challenged the crowd to show him another place that has the mountains, the lakes, a major employer like Duke Energy, a world-class university like Clemson, a state of the art hospital like Oconee Medical Center, the third busiest road in the country and a forest with 160 miles of hiking trails.

"No one can compete with this lifestyle if we all pull together in the same direction," Vick said.

Rhodes said that the former Propex plant provided the perfect site for his company's production of resin products.

"The Southeast is the only growing manufacturing region in the country, and this move allows us to be next door to our customer base," Rhodes said.

He said some production lines have already been installed at the Seneca site and that others will follow. He said the firm hopes to produce 20 million pounds of product this year and 50 million pounds after two years.

Moulder said the county's role in promoting economic development requires that it be prepared to provide what companies are looking for. He said the county must focus on job recruitment, job retention and small business and product development.

"It's going to be all about partnerships, about putting aside our differences and working together," he said. "I see great things in your future."

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