OEA annual meeting highlights economic development advances

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
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SENECA — Heads of companies looking for the right location to expand their business do pay attention to what the corporate tax rate is in an area, but there are other factors and incentives that CEOs take into consideration when making such decisions, an expert told community leaders during the annual meeting of the Oconee Economic Alliance on Friday.

Having products available — whether buildings or certified industrial parks — is essential to simply getting prospects to look at an area, said Craig Fisher, a principal with Tax Incentives Consultants LLC, which has offices in Massachusetts, North Carolina and Texas.

Fisher offered his insights as the featured speaker during a luncheon meeting at the Lighthouse restaurant that highlighted the county's economic development achievements.

"Most of my clients, the companies we're working with don't want to wait 18 months to build a facility," Fisher said. "They made a decision they need to be in a market and they want to be in that market tomorrow for whatever reason. ... Having things that they can see, or near being ready, I think expedites that process."

Fisher said the importance of having a trained workforce cannot be overstated. When companies want to add a second shift, they want that second shift to be as efficient as the first shift, Fisher added.

"When you compare South Carolina to a lot of other states, there are different incentive packages," Fisher said. "Some states offer wage base or job training that's a cash reimbursement that the company does. A lot of companies like that. A lot of our clients are more interested in having the state help out with the training. ... Having the flexibility of either-or, sometimes there's a benefit for a company to get the employees they want in the most helpful way."

Fisher doesn't particularly buy into the argument that lowering the corporate tax rate is more important than to offer incentives.

"If corporate tax rate was the driving factor in the location analysis, you'd see every major company in Nevada, where there's no corporate income tax," Fisher said. "I think it's one of the pieces that goes into it. South Carolina certainly is competitive. ... Driving how you attract businesses solely based on tax rate, especially on the corporate side, I think is somewhat shortsighted."

'The Golden Corner is starting to really, really shine.'



Richard Blackwell
Oconee Economic Alliance
executive director

Fisher congratulated the Oconee Economic Alliance and county leaders for their work in attracting businesses and creating jobs.

OEA executive director Richard Blackwell said the county had a record year in 2015. He said businesses invested $53 million and added 426 jobs.

OEA chairman Glenn Buddin recognized Blackwell's leadership role in advancing economic development in Oconee. Since taking over in April 2012, Oconee has seen $188 million in capital investment and the addition of 900 new jobs.

Earlier this year, the Upstate Alliance announced that Blackwell was selected by his peers as Economic Development Director of the Year.

"Things are going well," Blackwell said. "The Golden Corner is starting to really, really shine."

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