

Oconee invests in industrial parks



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Richard Blackwell, executive director of the Oconee County Economic Development Commission, says his office is "working fast and furious" to bring new industries and jobs to the area.

One open now, three may be ready soon

BY NORMAN CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — With one industrial park already filled, Oconee County's top economic development official said plans for three others will take time but will pay off in private investment and jobs.

"Over time, these industrial parks will be filled up with one to many industries that present new jobs to this community and also new investment," said Richard Blackwell, executive director of the Oconee County Economic Development Commission. "I think you're going to see an emphasis on telling

our story, letting them know that it's not just a great place to come boating with the recreational opportunities, but it's also a great place to have your business here and to work here."

Blackwell, who has been on the job for more than a year, said his office is "working fast and furious" on efforts to bring tenants to sites the county is developing.

"A lot of things are right on the cusp," he said. "We just need an answer to go a certain way and things could look very bright for Oconee County. I have no doubt it is going to happen."

One of four sites is filled with tenants and three others are at different stages of development. In a recent interview, Blackwell discussed the status of the four sites.

Oconee County Commerce Center

The 45-acre site, located on S.C. Highway 11 near Seneca, was purchased in 2001 in a partial land

swap that cost the county \$436,000. The county built two spec buildings in the park. One sold in 23 months and the other sold in 10 months.

The three companies that occupy the park - ITT, Lift-Tek LLC and the AID Company - have made an investment of more than \$12 million and employ more than 150 people. Lift-Tek has expanded its spec building from 40,000 to 80,000 square feet. The AID Company has already expanded its 50,000 square-foot spec building to 65,000 square feet and has 19 acres on the property for future expansion.

"I think that goes to show the value of speculative-type buildings," said Blackwell. "We like to say that it's bait on the hook. You get a company to come here, explore your community, look at the pros and cons. Sometimes they like the building and sometimes they don't, but they're sold on the community. Then you can show other proper-

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ties."

Oconee Industry and Technology Park (formerly Echo Hills)

The 300-acre farmland property was purchased in

that park.

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"We're very excited about that park," said Blackwell. "The big catalyst to get it going was, when we filled up the Oconee Commerce Park, we had land but we did not have industrial real estate."

He added that the park will soon receive recognition as a Certified Industrial Site by the state, which will make the property more marketable.

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Richard Blackwell
Oconee County
Economic Development
Director

"We're chasing seven projects with just that park," he said. "It's a numbers game. The more we chase, the better chance we have to land a project there."

"This is a certification that tells an industry that the risks for industrial use have been eliminated," Blackwell said. "A lot of companies will only locate on a certified site. It gives us a leg up on the competition."

Blackwell said Oconee Industry and Technology Park has five planned phases with about 200 acres undeveloped in the first phase. He said he hopes to have a company constructing a building there by early 2014.

December 2010 for \$2.5 million. Development of the first phase is expected to be completed by July at a cost of an additional \$2.5 million. That first phase will have two gravel pads - 50,000 square feet and 300,000 square feet - where buildings could be built.

Golden Corner Commerce Park

While the Golden Corner Commerce Park was purchased in 2005 - five years before Oconee Industry and Technology Park - the lack of sewer in the area has held up development of about 260 acres of farmland. County Council approved the \$9 million Sewer South project, which will bring sewer lines and a pump station to the park as well as other parts of Oconee County. It is expected to be complete in late 2014.

"There is now a plan to bring opportunity to that piece of real estate," said Blackwell. "It is two miles to Interstate 85, making it the closest industrial park in South Carolina to Atlanta."

Seneca Rail Site

The Seneca Rail Site is a joint venture between the county and the City of Seneca and is located off Shiloh Road in Seneca. Seneca owns a building, often referred to as the Propex building, and has Johnson Controls and Altera Polymers in the building. The Protera electric buses coming to the city later this year will be housed on that property as well.

Oconee County owns a 100-acre-plus property, and Seneca owns the building. Blackwell said the fact that the site is next to the railroad serviced by Norfolk-Southern makes it attractive to companies who would want to ship products to the Inland (rail) port in Greer and then on to the port in Charleston.

"The importance of having a direct tie-in to the inland port in Greer is an industrial company can make their product in Oconee County and ship it through this site using this rail straight in to the inland port. From there it gets down to the port of Charleston very quickly and then out to the global market," Blackwell said.

