

Pickens development: The focus factor

This is the second of a two-part series on the economic development recruitment success of Pickens County.

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Pickens County takes a back seat to no one when it comes to economic development. Whether through its commerce park that welcomed the first occupant in 2004 and now has **five** firms, to three industries that said **just** this year that they will expand into Pickens **County**, things

have never looked better. It hasn't always been that way, however.

ALMOST A NO-GO

Pickens County's current run of economic success might have never come about had the commerce park failed to come to fruition and making that park a reality wasn't easy.

"I remember (Pickens County Administrator) Chap (Hurst) and (then Pickens County Council Chairman) Neil Smith calling me on more than one occasion about the exit ramps," State Sen. Larry Martin said, recalling one of the biggest obstacles

the park faced. "We had worked several years on that and were at a dead end with the DOT on cost involvement, especially replacing the existing bridge.

"Chap called me and said he had gotten everything lined up from the County Transportation Committee, whose chairman then was B.R. Skelton, and B.R. did a good job coordinating the various funding pots going into it. Everything was tied into those exit ramps (at Cartee Road) so, without those ramps, there would have been no industrial park."

SEE PICKENS, PAGE A5



FILE PHOTO

St. Jude Medical Inc., a longtime Pickens County business, is among the beneficiaries of the county's economic development success experienced in recent years.



FILE PHOTO

The Reliable Automatic Sprinkler Company relocated from New York to the Pickens County Commerce Park shortly after the park was completed in 2005.

PICKENS: 'A more prosperous future'

FROM PAGE A1

Martin said the commerce park was "the catalyst for putting Pickens County back in business."

"For years, we were known as being textile oriented and related businesses associated with that," he said. "The loss of the textile industry cut deeply into our economic base, and a lot of us that worked in textiles realized that if something wasn't done we were going to face a challenge on the job front."

Another component that aided the boom was Martin's work through the Enterprise Zone Act.

The act features a variety of tax credits and Martin was able to add a section to the bill that enabled the county to receive credits because it had no direct access to the interstate.

Martin, an attendee at recent economic development announcements, said he is encouraged by Pickens County's continued economic growth.

"If you look back over time, that's usually when businesses plant the seeds for growth — during difficult economic times," Martin said. "We're for-

ward to seeing what Pickens County officials plan to do with the old Tri-County Landfill property below Central, a site he feels would be "a tremendous piece of property" for high-tech, good paying jobs.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

While Pickens County has enjoyed economic development success in recent years, leaders feel the future is even brighter.

Pickens County Council Chair Jennifer Willis said the county has shown an ability to respond quickly to some unique situations.

"When we announced the success the robotics program in our schools was having, VCI saw that and made inquiries," Willis said. "We had an existing building and, therefore, were able to move them there during a very short time."

Farley said through the success of the robotics, mechatronics and machine tool program has trickled down through the recruitment of JR Automation and KP Components.

"That's another testament of the quality of students the Pickens County Career and Technology Center is putting out," Farley said.

Martin said he is looking

forward to seeing what Pickens County officials plan to do with the old Tri-County Landfill property below Central, a site he feels would be "a tremendous piece of property" for high-tech, good paying jobs.

"It has the potential for some really exciting future development in Pickens County," Martin said.

Tri-County Technical College President Ronnie Booth, who also serves as chairman of the Alliance Pickens board, said he feels good about the future because of the solid plan Pickens County Council has formulated regarding economic development.

"Pickens County has earned a reputation for being aggressive in their recruiting efforts and they have found their sweet spot in targeting smaller, more closely-held companies that allow them to get to the decision makers more easily," Booth said. "A tremendous cooperative spirit exists between the council, Alliance Pickens and everyone who works to promote economic development in Pickens County."