Report shows 'ripple effects' of Oconee economic development

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SENECA — Coming off its best year yet for economic development, Oconee County is seeing even more benefits from its efforts than state-reported figures show, according to a firm that specializes in economic and fiscal impact.

Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell recently announced to investors that the organization ushered in $89.97 million in capital investments across four economic development projects in 2016 — the highest total ever achieved for the county in a calendar year — as well as 113 new jobs.

FOR MORE

Further details from the report referenced in this article are available in a guest op-ed from the Oconee Economic Alliance on page **A4**.

Since the OEA formed in 2012, Oconee has seen $279 million in capital investment and 1,100 new jobs lured through economic development efforts.

But according to new data released by

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Blackwell, the 25 projects lured by the county over that timeframe have had more impact on Oconee than the baseline numbers from the S.C. Department of Commerce indicate.

A report from the firm Impact DataSource showed those projects have indirectly created an additional 483 jobs in the county. The total of 1,589 jobs will provide almost $46 million in wages to Oconee County families.

"In addition, the county and its residents benefitted as the projects generated $72.9 million in construction spending and created 769 construction jobs that provided $33.4 million in wages," Blackwell shared on the OEA website.

Blackwell said the county is expected to receive approximately $12.4 million in new property taxes over the 10-year period evaluated by Impact DataSource, which specializes in economic impact modeling related to economic and community development.

The OEA paid for the third-party analysis "to gauge the economic impact and ripple effects" of the county's economic development efforts, according to Blackwell.

"We wanted to go deeper than just a simple announcement, per se, to show how successful economic development can transform the economic base of a community," he said of the study.

This year's projects include three expansions — Nason ($2.5M, 26 jobs), Sealed Air ($6.77M) and BASF ($60M) — and one new project, Baxter Manufacturing and Hi-Tech Mold Carolina's decision to establish operations at the Oconee Industry and Technology Park, a $20.7 million capital investment that will create 87 jobs.

Blackwell said recently construction of the Baxter/Hi-Tech building is nearly done, and the company will begin hiring and making products for BMW early next year.

Among other accomplishments this year that Blackwell recently shared included that the county began 2016 with unemployment at 5.9 percent, and that number had fallen to a 15-year low of 3.8 percent as of Nov. 30.

"It has not been this low since January 2001," Blackwell said.

He also noted that as of Nov. 30, Oconee had 33,842 employed, the highest number employed in the history of the county and up from 32,700 on Jan. 1.

"That is 1,142 more Oconee citizens working, and that means roughly 103 people a month were added to payrolls over the last 11 months," he said.

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