State commerce official lauds Oconee's economic successes

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
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SENECA — The success enjoyed by Oconee County in racking up impressive economic development numbers over the past few years is not going unnoticed.

Given the friendly rivalry that goes on between the 46 South Carolina counties trying to bring new business and capital investments to their communities, it's easy to turn a blind eye to what someone else is doing, especially when the successes start mounting.

"I'm here to tell you Oconee is doing very well," said Nelson Lindsay, Thursday's guest at the business forum hosted by the Oconee Economic Alliance at Thrift Development Corp. on Bountyland Road.

It had to be gratifying to OEA director Richard Blackwell's team, which includes project manager Russell Johnson and marketing manager Caroline Warner, to hear a consummate pro in the field shower them with praise for what Oconee is doing to advance economic development in the county.

Lindsay spent 18 years in Blackwell's position for Kershaw and Richland counties before the S.C. Department of Commerce hired him last year to head the agency's Global Business Development division.

In his capacity, Lindsay oversees 11 project managers. He's been in the job five months and knows firsthand just how competitive it can get to sell South Carolina to prospective businesses that are also being wined and dined by other states and countries.

Still, what Oconee is doing was enough to catch Lindsay's attention.

"We're jealous because it's all friendly competition," he told the large

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'Oconee has done very well in the past several years.'

Nelson Lindsey
S.C. Department of Commerce official

SUCCESSES: Blackwell 'very well thought of,' Lindsay says

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gathering of Oconee stakeholders at the forum. "Every community wants every project. Oconee has done very well in the past several years."

The numbers Oconee put up in 2015 are impressive — more than 426 new jobs, eclipsing the number over the two previous years, capital investments totaling $53 million, bringing the three-year total to $188 million, and more than 390,000 square feet of new development, about half of which is already occupied.

From his vantage point, Lindsay has identified five things that are driving Oconee's success story — a strong industrial base and presence that suggests to prospective businesses they won't be the only kid on the block, product development in the form of certified industrial parks, a workforce that is trained and experienced in manufacturing, nearby Clemson University and a beautiful area to live, work and play.

Lindsay also identified a sixth plus in Oconee's favor — Blackwell.

"Now, I don't want to embarrass him," Lindsay said. "He is very well thought of here in South Carolina. Hopefully y'all can hold on to him, because he does an excellent job and is recognized throughout the state."

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