

Industry ready for takeoff



Aviation is a growing industry, like the Boeing plant here positioning itself to take advantage of that

State poised for growth in aviation

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South Carolina's top economic development official said the state is possibly on the cusp of growth in aviation-related industries on the heels of Boeing's ribbon cutting on its plant in North Charleston last week.

Commerce Secretary Bobby Hitt told GreenvilleOnline.com that he, Gov. Nikki Haley and other economic development officials will attend the Paris Air Show this month, with the aim of helping that potential become reality. They also plan to visit other companies, some in Germany.

"I see this as relationship building," he said. In fact, the state built a relationship with Boeing through earlier attendance at the air shows, which are held in Paris and the United Kingdom. The show, like auto shows, "is primarily sales and networking."

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Hitt

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firms in nearby Greensboro, N.C., Atlanta and Savannah, Ga., and in South Carolina, the state has a lot to offer.

John Baker, director of Greenville Works, said he knows of at least 20 companies in Greenville County alone that do aviation or aerospace work and another three or four that could convert to that type of manufacturing.

"What they need is opportunities," he said, adding that Boeing and OEMs in adjacent states can provide those. The Upstate's aviation cluster is an attempt to make the industry more visible and help the suppliers forge relationships with OEMs.

"We're at the start of this. I think BMW is a very good model for Boeing," he said, adding that BMW helped attract another supplier to the state last year. "As the host company gets larger, so does the supplier base."

Baker said aviation-related companies generate "significant employment."