# Crossroads

This is a partial list of manufacturers and the decade in which they began operation in Oconee County.

Now closed




Covidien
Jacobs Chuck
Milliken/Defore Plant




Itron
Kennametal
Oconee Machine Tool
Timken

**1960**




Cast Products
Collins Craft Fiberglass
Duke Power
ITT Compact Automations
SNS South

**1970**

BASF
Carolina Plastics
Hi-Tech Plating
Johnson Controls
Kroeger Marine
Lift-Tek

**1980**

This is the third of a six-part series looking at economic development past, present and future

## Oconee County's Manufacturing history



Mold Clinic
Nason
Square D
U.S. Engine Valve
Sandvik/Valenite




B.M.I.
Borgwarner
CG Roxane
Cryovac
Dixie Aluminum
Dynamic Fluid Component

**1990**

Ideal Steel
Integrated Support
Kauffman Truss
Parkway Products
Round Mountain Bottling

Buffalo Machine
Industrial Plastics Group
ITECH South
Jantzen/Seneca
Sharpe Manufacturing

**2000**

# The battle to build an industrial base in Oconee County

By ANDREW MOORE
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> *How someone would find this area on purpose, to be very honest, I don't know.*
>
> — EDC Director Jim Alexander

Trying to reel industry into Oconee County is nothing new.

Whether it's been Jim Alexander sitting down with representatives of an international firm or his predecessor Bob Gaillard casually ambling across a barren tract of land with a potential developer, Oconee has been increasingly focused on finding manufacturing.

### The Early Years




In 1979, those efforts were coordinated by the county's Planning and Development Commission. A 1980 ordinance provided for the chairman of the commission to be chosen by the county's elected supervisor.

The primary duty of the commission was to "advise Oconee County Council on any matter affecting development and planning for the development of Oconee County." That advice was to take the form of written reports and by means of helping formulate budget appropriations affecting development.

One of the first major businesses to enter the scene during the initial era of business recruitment was Valenite.

"Valenite opened the first tungsten carbide insert manufacturing plant in Westminster in 1977," Fredrik Makk of Sandvik (previously Valenite), said. "Over the next several years, four more plants were built for carbide insert production. The last plant was built in 1980." A major expansion of the primary Westminster plant took place in 2007.

Gaillard became the director of the county's economic recruitment efforts in 1985 and with his entrance came a period of unprecedented growth and expansion.

Johnson Controls came to Oconee County in 1985, followed by Square D in 1986, BASF Catalysts in 1987 and Lift-Tek and U.S. Engine Valve in 1988. Also part of this golden age of economic development were Covidien and Sandvik/Valenite.

Today, these firms account for eight percent of all employment in Oconee County. However, while all remain viable employers, all are being tested by the current recession.

Work force is a big factor

Larry Smith of Square D (Schneider Electric) said his company once employed 850 people. Economic Development Commission (EDC) stats show the company has been a consistent employer of about 650 people for the last 10 years. However, cutbacks have been made in recent months and multiple sources are now indicating that additional layoffs are imminent.

"Location, work force quality and availability, competitive labor rate, access to transportation and interstates were some incentives (to come to Oconee County)," Smith said. "Tri-County Tech and the tech system is a big plus for industries and has been for us. Close proximity to a major university (Clemson) with a good engineering program is key."

Today, Smith is heavily

See INDUSTRY, Page 5A

## Still to come....

**Thursday:** Public funds for job retention? Some have suggested starting a job retention trust to assist existing businesses. Can it be done? How are state and federal funds being used today?



**Friday:** A different age: Development competition used too be between counties. Now, it's between continents. How have we adapted? How have we done? What might other opportunities be?



**Saturday:** The Golden Corner Commerce Park: Can the 'hay field' become our industrial Nirvana or is it better suited for something else? What are the options?

