Upstate making strides in recognition

By Hal Johnson

GUEST COLUMN



Hal Johnson is president and CEO of the Upstate SC Alliance, a public/private regional economic development organization designed to market the 10 counties in South Carolina's Upstate. For more information go to www.upstatescalliance.com.

Everyone in the Upstate knows we have a great story to tell.

Located on the Interstate 85 Boom Belt connecting Atlanta and Charlotte, the Upstate offers easy access to the mountains and the beach, a diverse economy, a moderate climate, a strong workforce and a solid infrastructure core. All of this makes the Upstate an enticing opportunity for new economic development.

A main part of the Upstate SC Alliance's mission is to spread that story far and wide so it is welcome news when our region gets recognition from outside groups highlighting our growth and our opportunities.

The three major metros that make up the Upstate — Anderson, Spartanburg and Greenville — all recently got strong rankings from the Milken Institute's Best-Performing Cities Index. This system ranks metropolitan areas by how well they are creating and sustaining jobs and economic growth. The components include job, wages and salary, and technology growth. In most years, these give a good indication of the underlying structural performance of regional economics.

All three Upstate metro areas made major advancements on the list in 2012. Greenville, which includes Mauldin and Easley, jumped more than 60 spots from number 113 in the country to number 52 amongst large metro areas and was 17th overall in one-year job growth.

Spartanburg moved up more than 70 spots from 181st overall to 108 in the rankings. It ranked ninth in the Biggest Gainers category; second in one-year relative high-tech GDP growth and 20th in Job Growth Percentage Between May 2011 and May 2012.

Anderson saw its rank among small market metros go from 141 to 127 and was ranked 19th for 5-Year Relative High-Tech GDP Growth (2006-2011) and 10th in one-year relative high-tech GDP growth.

What this means for our region is that we are growing stronger. This is the kind of data that underlies what we have been seeing as a region for quite some time. We need to keep that momentum moving forward in 2013.

That is part of the reason the Upstate SC Alliance created THE SCORE in late 2012 and will be a strong tool for us in 2013. This report gives us a quarterly snapshot of major projects announced world-wide. It will help us see just how well the Upstate is attracting new capital investment and creating new jobs. It is arranged in a format that is easy to read quickly — like a score card. It helps us track worldwide activity in the five target industries on which the Upstate SC Alliance is focused: Aerospace, Automotive, BioScience, Energy and Advanced Materials.

The more we know about where the Upstate stands globally helps us keep moving forward and allows us the opportunity to strategize and grow. While we are proud of the significant jumps our region saw, we want to see them get even higher.

We believe the success the region has shown in the past decade backs up the point that the Upstate is one of the best places in the world to do business.