

Official touts Oconee economy after state report

—SENEGA— A recent report on manufacturing in all 50 states in the U.S. gave South Carolina an "A" grade for manufacturing, but also grades ranging from "B" to "D" in other categories.

However, Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell said the county is exceeding those marks.

"I would argue that we are seeing Oconee perform better than the remarks made about South Carolina," Blackwell said. "The manufacturing sector and overall economy within Oconee County is strong currently."

The 2018 Manufacturing and Logistics Report Card, released by the Ball State University Center for Business and Economic Research and Conexus Indiana, said while South Carolina received an "A" in manufacturing, the Palmetto State earned a "C" in logistics, a "B+" in diversification, a "C" in tax climate and a "D" in human capital.

But Blackwell said the facts prove Oconee County is doing quite nicely, pointing out that the unemployment rate in the county is at 2.7 percent, the lowest it has been since April 1998, and that 1,591 new jobs have been announced in the Golden Corner since 2012. He also said the county has had \$501,376,354 in new taxable capital investment and has also seen the number of residents employed rise from 28,762 to 33,381 since Jan. 1, 2012. That represents an increase of 4,619 Oconee residents who have become employed as of May of this year.

"In addition to those stats, we have seen the diversification of our economy continue as not only our manufacturing base is adding different jobs and processes, but we are now seeing a stronger retail sector take root

in our community," Blackwell said. "We expect to see more of this, and with job growth and retail, then we will begin to see housing follow."

Blackwell also said Oconee County's tax climate is favorable, as the Golden Corner has one of the lowest tax structures in South Carolina. Among Upstate economies, Blackwell said, Oconee County is the fourth fastest growing community behind Greenville, Spartanburg and Anderson from 2010-17.

He said the county also has the logistical advantage of being the "bull's eye" between Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C., on the I-85 corridor and within 60 miles of both the South Carolina Inland Port and Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport.

"The transportation network is here to make an impact on the global market," Blackwell said.

The Oconee economic director said the county has a quality "ready to work" labor shed, with more than 632,000 people from 11 counties "and great schools in place from primary to higher education."

"The talent needed for success is here," he said. "We have apprenticeship models in place in our high schools and a new technical college campus coming online focused solely on manufacturing needs within an industrial park setting."

State Sen. Thomas Alexander of Walhalla also feels Oconee County is "doing great" economically.

"The fact that manufacturing jobs are continuing to come and expand here in Oconee County, to me, speaks of the confidence

the manufacturing community has with the success of their operations here," Alexander said.

The state senator said while efforts will continue to be made "to get A's all the way

across," he feels Oconee County is blessed economically.

"I'm pleased with the economic team here and the work that is being done at the county level and their partnership with the economic team at the state level," Alexander said.

