

# Attraction, retention focus for economic

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WALHALLA — Continued workforce development and retention is a priority for the Oconee Economic Alliance in 2019.

Interim executive director Janet Hartman addressed Oconee County Council's Planning and Economic Development Committee this week outlining goals focused on recruiting workers into the county.

With unemployment rates at record lows, Hartman said other issues must be addressed to keep the workforce growing.

"We've been having real issues with our workforce and those types of things within our industries and businesses, so we've decided we need to work on those workforce development issues and specifically on talent attraction and retention," she said. "As you've heard, we're very close to Clemson University, and we've got great students coming out of the Oconee County school district. However, we don't do a good job of recruiting and retaining those folks in our community, so we're going to put a real push on those initiatives for the 2019 year."

Quality of life is one factor the alliance plans to promote more.

"We know it's a great place to

live in Oconee County, and we need to be showing all the different aspects of the county, and



Hartman

that will be through our Think Oconee initiative and some of the Destination Oconee things we've been doing," Hartman said. "We'll really focus on how we retain those folks in our community, and if they graduate from Clemson, how do we get them to come here and find jobs and really market our community as a place that is good for living, starting a family and starting a business."

With the continued need for additional workers, another target group has been circled by the alliance to fulfill another goal — recent college graduates.

Hartman said attracting businesses to the county will help offer quality-of-life amenities for those graduates.

"We'll really be working hard with talent attraction and the young professionals group, (because) we're not retaining those folks here and they want to get to bigger cities because there's more to do, and we need to create that environment here," she said. "(We'll focus on) working with the cities to create that nucleus and sense of place. ... That's a huge piece of economic



FILE

**Two BorgWarner employees work at the company's Seneca plant in 2013. Interim Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Janet Hartman outlined goals this week focused on recruiting workers into the county.**

development, because we can continue to attract businesses here, but if we can't provide the workforce, then that's going to dry out pretty quickly. Word will get out that 'Hey, it's a great place to go, but you can't get any workers.' We're going to work really hard on that for 2019."

Another goal for the year is to identify a location for a second business incubator and to have the alliance's office in the same building as the incubator.

One incubator is currently located in Walhalla, but having

a second one closer to Clemson could attract other businesses to the potential housing opportunity.

"I feel the business incubator and getting a facility that is closer to Clemson is very important, because we don't think it's very far to drive to Walhalla, but if you're over in Clemson, coming all the way into Walhalla isn't going to work," Hartman said. "We need an environment that is a little bit more upscale and has a contemporary look to it, and that's what we're hoping to see."

## alliance in 2019

We've been looking at different areas where we might potentially locate this incubator, and our hope and intent is to locate the Oconee Economic Alliance offices in the same building with that.

"We've determined, based on what we're looking at, potentially 10,000 square feet would be necessary to house both of those together," Hartman added.

"That is a huge piece of product development for us as well, and there's a lot of interest in helping small business in that incubation period and moving it possibly into the downtown environment or into the industrial park — it just depends on the size of the business."

Hartman emphasized sprucing up the Oconee Industry and Technology Park as a priority.

"We're going to be working to continue to put emphasis on our infrastructure within our industrial parks, the look and feel at the industry and technology park, because we have to be cognizant of how things look when folks are visiting," she said. "We're very fortunate to have the workforce development campus there, and now the Hamilton Career Center will be open in 2020, so now we're able to showcase that initiative, but we also want to increase the aesthetics at the site."