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*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

# Regional partnership's investments lead to major announcements across southeastern North Carolina

*ELIZABETHTOWN, N.C.* – A regional product development initiative has supported industrial growth across 20 counties with the support of \$7.5 million in state appropriations since 2021, supporting major company announcements of more than 2,100 new jobs and over \$1.2 billion in capital investment in the region.

"Our product development initiative has helped leverage industrial site and building development across the Southeast," said **North Carolina's Southeast (NCSE) President Steve Yost**. "In our 20-county region, the funds that we've deployed in some of our rural counties toward projects are game changers. More than that, they're life changers when they lead to companies like Amazon setting up shop and hiring people in those areas."

The North Carolina's Southeast Product Development Initiative began in 2022 with the state's initial \$5 million appropriation. Two years later, the North Carolina General Assembly allocated another \$2.5 million to the initiative. The Southeast has allocated 100 percent of that funding to its 20 counties in support of 26 industrial site development projects and 10 industrial building projects, turning that kernel of investment into more than \$64 million in leveraged funds. The initiative has supported the effort to make more than 150 acres into pad-ready industrial sites and identify 17 potential new sites.

"None of this would be possible if it weren't for the continued support by our state legislators," said Yost. "Without their support, our region wouldn't have been able to make the strides it's made in the last few years in terms of economic growth. We couldn't be more grateful to the Legislature at large for helping us make that happen."

"We see a lot of companies searching for shell buildings, but the other thing they're looking for are pad-ready sites," said Mark Pope, President of the North Carolina Global TransPark Economic Development Region. "Economic development is a fast-moving business. If we can offer companies a piece of property that they can move into tomorrow, it gives us a real edge on other states going after the same project. Everyone wants that billion-dollar deal, but only the area that's got the best site or shell building is going to win that."

The North Carolina Global TransPark Economic Development Region (NCGTPEDR) includes two counties within the Southeast's footprint: **Lenoir and Wayne Counties**. While Lenoir County is focused on preparing a pad-ready-site, Wayne County used the funding to support the two shell buildings that Turkish manufacturer Pelsan Tekstil is moving into.

"We'd barely put the finishing touch on those buildings before Pelsan took them down," said Pope. "We wouldn't have accomplished that if it weren't for the partnerships we had in bringing that idea to life — and that includes our partnership with NC's Southeast and their investment into those buildings. Now, we're looking forward to building two more just like them so we can land the next project, too."

**Scotland County's** shell building didn't last long on the market before a company called it home, either. The rural county used NCSE's product development funding to help upfit the 50,000 square-foot building. Now, Bailey Manufacturing Company (BMC), an automotive supplier, operates in the building. BMC announced 35 new jobs and \$4.3 million in investment.

"Economic development is a team sport: to win, we must trust and engage all of our teammates," said Jeff McKay, economic development director for Scotland County. "When Bailey Manufacturing showed interest in our second spec building in the Wallace Way Industrial Park, North Carolina's Southeast was right there as that trusted teammate to offer \$200,000 for tenant improvements. As this was a competitive project, that assistance was a key play for the win."

**Moore County** recently celebrated a win of its own after industrial-giant **Amazon** announced plans for a last-mile facility at Southern Pines Corporate Park, which was supported with some of the county's share of NCSE's funding. The newly constructed facility is 65,000 square feet and is part of Amazon's announcement to create 700 new jobs across five facilities in the state.

"Moore County is a thriving community, and we work hard to maintain that by stoking the fires of economic development," said Natalie Hawkins, President of Moore County Economic Development Partnership. "That job involves a lot of moving parts, so partnership is key to making it happen."

Achieving industrial growth in rural counties is challenging, so regional collaboration is important to realize success. For **Robeson and Bladen Counties**, collaboration came in the form of one economic developer, Chuck Heustess. He leads a small team to develop and enhance sites and buildings across both counties. In his time in that role, Heustess has seen NCSE's funding impact Robeson County's shell building site development and support the construction of a new incubator building in Bladen County.

"Robeson County is thrilled to have its first speculative industrial building in over a decade currently under construction," said Heustess. "Even before completion, which is anticipated by the end of the year, the building has generated strong interest, with marketing materials already distributed in response to approximately a dozen requests for information from prospective companies."

Bladen County's approach to economic development has been a best-practice program for other areas seeking industrial growth. Its incubator facilities provide the perfect space for small industrial companies looking for a place to grow, and many stay long-term after they find success in the Elizabethtown Industrial Park. One of those incubators was Elizabethtown Industrial Incubator 7, a nearly 12,000-square-foot facility that marked the third expansion of an existing business within the network.

"Westwood Manufacturing was our first incubator tenant nearly 25 years ago. They began by assembling and programming welding robots but have since expanded its operations significantly," said Heustess. "This continued growth has already driven the need to expand office space within the brand-new incubator, as Westwood plans to hire additional technicians and engineering professionals."

Funding from the Southeast has gone further than these few examples. In total, eight companies have announced locations in eight counties, either establishing new facilities or expanding an existing footprint within a community they've already come to love. Those announcements have generated 2,163 jobs and \$1,254,450,000 in capital investment. Beyond those tangible wins, North Carolina's Southeast's product development initiative has helped to keep economic development thriving in the region.

*A public-private partnership headquartered in Elizabethtown, N.C., North Carolina's Southeast's mission is to provide strong economic development leadership in southeastern North Carolina through innovative marketing and collaborative regional initiatives that will support the creation of new jobs, generate capital investment and secure new business locations. Member counties include Anson, Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Craven, Cumberland, Duplin, Hoke, Jones, Lenoir, Montgomery, Moore, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland and Wayne. For additional information, visit [www.ncse.org](http://www.ncse.org)*