



NEWS RELEASE

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NORTH CAROLINA'S SOUTHEAST CONTINUES STRONG RUN IN 2021-22

New Grant Program Focuses on Boosting Region's Product Inventory

December 15, 2022 (Elizabethtown, N.C.) Building on a historic wave of new jobs and investment, North Carolina's Southeast continued working with arriving and expanding businesses as they worked to bring new economic opportunities to the region in 2021-2022. Twelve companies across seven key industry segments unveiled plans to invest a total of \$419.6 million in the Southeast Region, creating 1,236 announced new jobs.

New operations included metalworking, distribution and logistics, renewable energy, food manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, building products, and life sciences. "We significantly exceeded the previous year's solid capital investment figure and came within a whisker of matching the job creation we announced in 2020-21," said Jeff Etheridge, chairman of North Carolina's Southeast. This year's \$419.6 million in announced capex compares with \$153.6 in 2020-21; the region announced 1,236 new jobs this year, just shy of the 1,291 tallied a year ago. In collaboration with its partners, 120 leads were generated during the year, resulting in 33 client visits and meetings, and 375 building and site recommendations.

"Some of this momentum can be traced to economic trends, but our excellent team of regional and county economic developers and private allies deserves the lion's share of the credit. Local developers close the deals, and they did an excellent job," Etheridge said.

Among the projects NC's Southeast generated and assisted was Design Mode Cabinetry, a custom designed cabinet manufacturing company. The building products company is investing \$13 million at a site in Duplin County that will employ a 139-person workforce. Champion Home Builders, part of North America's largest provider of manufactured housing, unveiled plans for a 385-worker production facility in Robeson County. The company will invest \$13.2 million there. The project was one of three announced in the region's building product sector, a longtime target cluster for North Carolina's Southeast.

NC's Southeast provides collaborative strategic and tactical economic development marketing and project management support for its 18 counties. "The efforts led by NCSE are as diverse as its member counties," says Robert Van Geons, President and CEO of the Fayetteville Cumberland County Economic Development Corporation. "Steve and the team have done an exceptional job adjusting to rapidly evolving economic conditions impacting our region, adds Van Geons, who chairs NC's Southeast's Local Developers Advisory Group (LDAG), which is composed of local

economic development leaders from across the region's 18 counties. "Through proactive and creative programming, our partnership has generated wins and enhanced the competitiveness of the region."

Approximately 75 percent of the region's announcements last year involved manufacturing, one of the most economically impactful industrial operations. Those names included Grupporeco, an Italian maker of kitchen appliance components that selected Lenoir County for the site of its first U.S. manufacturing operation. Its decision brings 110 jobs and \$28 million in capex to the Southeast. Grupporeco President and CEO Vincenzo Locatelli said "the COVID pandemic made this a challenging and time-consuming process, but the support of the authorities and community has been outstanding, and we're excited to have the project start very soon."

Mt. Olive Pickle Company, a homegrown food processing leader in Wayne County, announced plans for a \$35 million expansion that will create 167 jobs in the Southeast. "The Goldsboro expansion relieves pressures on the company's facilities in Mount Olive and positions us to handle growth well into the future," said Bobby Frye, president and CEO of Mt. Olive Pickle, which was founded in 1926. The company will add production, warehousing and distribution operations. "We are pleased that all of our operations will remain in Wayne County," Frye added.

In addition to its success in supporting expanding and newly arriving companies in the last fiscal year, NC's Southeast launched a new grant program designed to support the development of new industrial sites and industrial buildings. The program is being funded with a \$5 million appropriation from the North Carolina General Assembly. In July, the organization's leaders approved 23 awards under the program, which helps county partners fund engineering, design and planning work, in addition to hard infrastructure like water and wastewater systems and access roads. The funds will leverage another \$29 million from other sources for these projects.

"We've always been an organization that looks ahead," explains Steve Yost, President of NC's Southeast. "We knew our success in recent years might have a downside -- a shrinking inventory of the key industrial properties that today's companies look for." The product development initiative aims to prepare sites and speculative industrial buildings in every county, reducing the time and risk arriving employers face when launching new facilities. "The program leverages millions of dollars from county, federal, philanthropic and corporate sources," Yost explained, "making this a collaborative strategy that will help keep the region competitive."

See North Carolina's Southeast's two-year annual report [here](#).

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

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