BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Catawba County's industry has seen numerous changes over the last few years. With the loss of more than 7,000 jobs in the last six years, Catawba County has worked to find new ways to diversify the once primarily manufacturing base of the economy. With increased focus on non-manufacturing industries and enhanced services to existing industries, Catawba County has begun to see evidence of economic improvement.

Catawba County possesses a diverse economy with a strong manufacturing climate coupled with extensive retail and residential developments.

Outlook Americas has ranked three Catawba County municipalities in the top five Best Manufacturing Small Towns in the Country. *Southern Business & Development* ranked Catawba County the top mid-market in North Carolina and the 20th top mid-market in the South in their list of the "Top 250 Best Places in the South to Locate Your Company." *Forbe's Magazine* rated the Hickory Metro area 3rd in the nation for lowest business costs. Just some of the diversified manufacturing sectors that call Catawba County home include machining and metal working, plastics, cable and furniture.

Catawba County's manufacturing prowess is supported and accentuated by a rich geography and diverse lifestyle that has brought the area national recognition. The Hickory Metro area has been named the 10th Best Place to Live and Raise a Family in the United States by *Reader's Digest*. Business North Carolina magazine also reported that Catawba County's largest city, Hickory, was the 8th best city in the state for its quality of life.

Education and technical training continues to be a high priority for Catawba County. The Appalachian State University Greater Hickory Partnership is a joint education center developed to provide a unique collaborative learning experience to the Hickory Metro. Appalachian State University, Lenoir-Rhyne University and Catawba Valley Community College have become partners to serve the needs for graduate, undergraduate, non-credit certificate courses, research and specialized workforce training.

The Appalachian State University Greater Hickory Partnership provides the Hickory Metro with unparalleled economic development opportunities. Not only does the Center allow the County new promise to recruit and retain industry, it offers students and workers access to groundbreaking new educational experiences.