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Employment: Recruiting companies

From staff reports

The Development Authority of Cherokee County is concentrating this year on bringing more jobs to the county, with an emphasis on white-collar recruitment.

Development of a white-collar recruitment strategy started this year with the help of Del Boyette, a former deputy commissioner for the state Department of Economic Development.

“We have known for a long time that most people are going out of the county to work, most of those for white-collar jobs,” said Misti Martin, executive director of the authority.

Boyette, a principal of Boyette Levy economic development consultants, spoke during a conference in October at the Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce. He compared Cherokee to other similar counties that were successful at attracting white-collar jobs.

“It showed us we can do more,” Mrs. Martin said of the presentation’s impact on the decision to develop a recruitment strategy.

The strategy will include identifying the types of white-collar jobs the county wants to target and recommendations as to how to attract companies that offer those positions.

The authority also has plans this year to beautify its Airport/I-575 industrial park with new signage and landscaping in an effort to “create the right atmosphere,” Mrs. Martin said. The authority is considering launching another InSight survey similar to one conducted in 2007. The survey asked businesses how they were doing and what obstacles they were running into that the authority could help them overcome. “The economy was different at that time,” Mrs. Martin said. “We want to find ways to assist our existing industries to be sure they are still successful.”

She said the authority will continue its current programs, such as the existing industry initiative. In 2008, five industries applied for the program, bringing \$7 million in investment and preserving or creating about 100 jobs.

The program, which is designed to encourage and support local industrial expansion, allows for property taxes on certain improvements to be phased in over a number of years. The tax incentive applies to the value of new or reconditioned equipment or capital improvements.

Technical Systems Integrators, or Safepick, computer programming company of Ball Ground made a \$3.2 million investment for a new warehouse. Pilgrim’s Pride made a \$1.2 million improvement to its poultry processing plant on East Cherokee Drive to improve air quality. These improvements will preserve 79 jobs, according to the applications.

Three other applications will add 20 jobs total to the county. Kirk-Rudy of Woodstock, a supplier for the direct mail, printing, newspaper and card industries, made a \$739,933 investment in new equipment. Piolax auto parts manufacturer of Canton spent \$544,214 on new equipment. Schoen Insulation Services in Canton, a manufacturer of non-metallic machined parts, spent \$335,450 in new equipment.

The county also welcomed new industry in the past year. Peterson Aluminum, a metals service center for the architectural metals industry, signed a five-year lease on 73,000 square feet in the Cherokee Commerce Center off Highway 92 at Interstate 75 in southwest Cherokee.

Landscaping company John Deere Landscapes occupied 7,200 square feet, and Galaxy Gates occupied 8,000 square feet in the Woodtech Business Park off Highway 92 in southwest Cherokee. Galaxy manufactures gates, doors and surveillance systems. Lotus 911, an Internet hosting company, occupied 7,800 square feet in the Bluffs at Technology Park in Canton.

“I’m proud of the activity in spite of 2008 being a down year for the economy,” authority board Chairman Marshall Day of Ball Ground said. “It bodes well that in an unstable economy, existing industry is expanding and new prospects are looking at Cherokee

County.”

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Developers say The Bluffs at Technology Park in Canton is ready for business, with one company already operating there, and sites for more prepped and waiting.

Recent activity including the construction of government complex and the groundbreaking for a college is expected to spur interest in the planned Class A office park.

The 700-acre mixed-use development features 500 acres for office, light industrial and service-related business uses. When it reaches build-out in the next 10 to 15 years, the park is expected to have more than 5 million square feet of Class A office, professional office, business/ service, retail and residential space.

One building is complete, with a tenant already operating, and pad sites on Bluffs Court off Bluffs Parkway are available for sale ranging in size from four to 11 acres, said Paul Michael, vice president of TPA Realty Services, which owns the park. The pad sites are graded, equipped with utilities and ready for development, he said. Future office and business service office sites also are ready for grading in the park along the Hickory Log Creek Reservoir.

Russ Sanders, president of FactoryMation, the first business tenant to move into the Bluffs, said the addition of Chattahoochee (Appalachian) Technical College made an impact.

“We wanted to draw from their pool of talent for our employees,” he said.

The Jasper-based college last year broke ground on a 62,500-square-foot campus in the park, which will be the first college in Canton. The campus should be completed in the spring of 2011, with classes starting by that summer.

FactoryMation previously operated in the Interstate 575/Airport Industrial Park south of Ball Ground. The move was needed so the electrical, electronic industrial automation parts distributor could expand, Sanders said.

The company now operates in 15,000 square feet of space in a 57,000-square-foot building by Wilson, Huff and Neal, which plans to build three more spec buildings for a total of 200,000 square feet.

Mrs. Martin said her office is receiving more inquiries from companies about the park. She said the recent activity is building momentum for the project. “With the county moving in and the construction of the Appalachian Tech campus, it is going to call attention to the Bluffs and create a lot of action,” she said. “These are just pieces of the puzzle.”

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Cherokee County has seen a jump in office and retail space in the past seven years, and even more growth is expected.

Cherokee ranked eighth in the 20-county metro area in the amount of usable office space with 2.6 million square feet in 2007, according to a new report from the Atlanta Regional Commission. The total reflects a 41-percent increase from the 1.9 million square feet of space in the county in 2000.

The county also was home to about 7.3 million square feet of retail space in 2007, up from 5 million square feet in 2000 — a 44.4 percent increase, which was the fourth highest in metro Atlanta.

Cherokee saw the sixth-highest rate of office space growth in metro Atlanta, following Forsyth (102 percent), Henry (85.3), Newton (54), Spalding (44) and Paulding (41.5).

As far as total office space, Cherokee ranks behind Fulton (135.4 million square feet), DeKalb (35.4), Cobb (32.9), Gwinnett (25.8), Forsyth (3.9), Clayton (3.6) and Fayette (2.9).

Cherokee saw a vacancy rate of 10.8 percent, the fifth-lowest rate in the region. Cherokee follows Walton (3.1 percent), Coweta (3.7), Hall (9.2) and Douglas (10.5).

Cherokee ranks for retail space growth in metro Atlanta behind only Henry (85.8 percent), Forsyth (66) and Paulding (52.5).

For actual total retail space, Cherokee ranks behind Fulton (53.7 million square feet), Gwinnett (44.2), DeKalb (36.8), Cobb (34.8), Clayton (13.4) and Coweta (7.5).

Cherokee saw a retail space vacancy rate of 9.4 percent in 2007, ranking at No. 12 in the metro area. Counties with lower rates include: Coweta (3.5 percent), Fayette (5.5), Gwinnett (5.8), Fulton (7.4), Cobb (7.5), Rockdale (7.9), Douglas (8), DeKalb (8.5), Clayton (8.6), Forsyth (8.7) and Henry (8.8).

Cherokee also saw a significant jump — 80.2 percent, the region's fourth-highest increase — in the amount of per capita sales during the last decade. Cherokee ranked behind Walton (134 percent), Rockdale (113) and Douglas (87).

Cherokee's per capita sales in 2006 were the seventh-highest in metro Atlanta, following Rockdale (\$24,397), Douglas (\$21,060), Fulton (\$18,375), Gwinnett (\$17,697), Cobb (\$17,527) and Spalding (\$15,437).

For total retail sales in 2006, Cherokee with \$2.7 million ranked sixth in metro Atlanta, following Fulton (\$17.6 million), Gwinnett (\$13.4), Cobb (\$11.9), DeKalb (\$7.2) and Clayton (\$3.3).

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