



Georgetown County, South Carolina

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Outlook summit highlights county's plan for economic development

GEORGETOWN COUNTY — It's a new era for economic development in Georgetown County. That's what Brian Tucker, the new director of the county's economic development department told local leaders in business and government Tuesday at an inaugural Economic Development Outlook Summit.

The event, organized by and hosted in cooperation with Horry-Georgetown Technical College, took place at the school's Georgetown campus and gave attendees a glimpse at where economic development efforts are headed under Tucker's leadership. Present were representatives from local industry, County Council, Georgetown City Council, Andrews Town Council, Georgetown County School District, the Georgetown County Chamber of Commerce and the Alliance for Economic Development, as well as strategic workforce development partners.

"We're working with a blank slate," said Tucker, who joined the county's staff in January. He said he's starting fresh and plans to use the county's existing assets to lure industry and create job growth, rather than allowing plans to hinge on dredging of the Georgetown Port and securing interstate access, which have long been identified as two of the area's biggest hurdles in achieving economic growth.

"What we have done here before today does not matter. We all understand there are challenges we face, but that's not important," Tucker said.

While efforts to see those projects completed will continue and remain a priority, "we can't wait for those two things to happen before we go out and really start beating the bushes to get businesses here," he said. "There are a ton of opportunities out there I believe we can pursue successfully with what we have now."

He listed the county's top strengths as quality of life, low-cost reliable energy, availability and cost of land, port access and proximity to Boeing. He pointed to businesses that are already thriving in the county, such as AgruAmerica, International Paper, SafeRack and Mercom, and talked of helping those businesses grow. He also referenced a large number of successful business owners who retire to Georgetown County and spoke of finding ways to identify that type of individual earlier. The county should be working to convince them there's no reason to wait for retirement to move to the beach — they could move their family and their business to Georgetown County and start enjoying life here now.

Georgetown County Administrator Sel Hemingway said if he had to give a theme to the

county's current economic development efforts, he'd choose "the game has changed." He described Tucker as the county's new quarterback and said the county has a winning game plan and an incredible advantage with the home field.

"We will play to our strengths and not dwell on our weaknesses," Hemingway said. "Brian has a true vision that we all embrace for Georgetown County. There are some exciting times ahead for us."

The message given was "spot on with where we are in the county right now," said Dan Stacy, a board member for the Alliance for Economic Development, a partner agency for the county. "There does seem to be a renewed spirit of teamwork and cooperation toward a common goal. There are some new players, some new leadership, and I think we will be well positioned to partner with Horry County, NESAs, or on our own to develop many more new opportunities."

Bill Crowther, executive director for the Alliance noted that the meeting was "well attended by all the people that should be here" and had a very positive energy.

"Brian and Sel working together have a great vision for where they want to take the county," he said. "As for the Alliance's participation, we're going to work hand-in-hand with them to try to make some great things happen for Georgetown County."

The summit also featured an overview of workforce development needs in the county from H. Neyle Wilson, president of Horry-Georgetown Technical College. He said the presence a community technical school with programs such as welding, machine programming and machine tool training is imperative to economic development. His school is fully on board with maintaining and/or creating the programs the county will need to be able to attract and provide workforce for new and expanding industries.

South Carolina is already leading the country in attracting industry, Wilson said, and he believes Georgetown County is well positioned to become a leader in the state for attracting businesses that create 200-250 jobs and offer good wages and benefits for trained workers.

Tucker will also participate this month in a Regional Economic Outlook Forum sponsored by the Economic Outlook Board of Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments. The event will be March 19 at 9:30 a.m. in Litchfield.

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