

Industrial development booming in Gaston County

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Gaston County is in higher demand as a location for new industry than at any time in the past 38 years, County Economic Development Executive Director Donny Hicks told Belmont Rotarians recently. And he would know, because that's how long he has been the

county's chief industry recruiter. And he twice has been named North Carolina's top economic development director.

Gaston County has gained 10 million square feet of new industrial space in the past three years. By comparison, it gained only seven million square feet in the previous 40 years. New industries have developed 1,400 acres in Gaston

County in the past 22 months compared to 4,000 acres over the past 40 years.

At a Belmont Rotary Club meeting, Hicks said the greatest change he's witnessed in his career is in the methods used and time it takes global industry decision-makers to evaluate a potential site for development.

"We used to have months to interest a prospect," he said, noting his office pre-

viously mailed large volumes of data to company executives considering a Gaston County location. "Now we have minutes," he added, because they can collect most of the information they need online.

Having a well prepared site that meets the prospect's requirements is

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the key to winning, or even being considered, in the highly competitive field of business recruiting, Hicks said. And developing business parks with sites available for quick delivery has helped Gaston County to recruit many new employers recently.

Some of the business parks Hicks highlighted include:

Gateway 85

Just off Interstate 85 between Gastonia and Lowell, this is one of the county's fastest developing parks, but Hicks said he marketed the site more than 36 years before it took off recently.

Three massive buildings have been completed, one of which totals 1.5 million square feet and ranks as the second largest distribution center in the Charlotte region. Two more buildings are under construction and still more are planned.

Newell Brands, Amazon and the United States Postal Service occupy the buildings already in service.

Gastonia Technology Park

One of the county's most successful major business parks, the 422-acre Gastonia Technology Park is in Dallas near Gaston College.

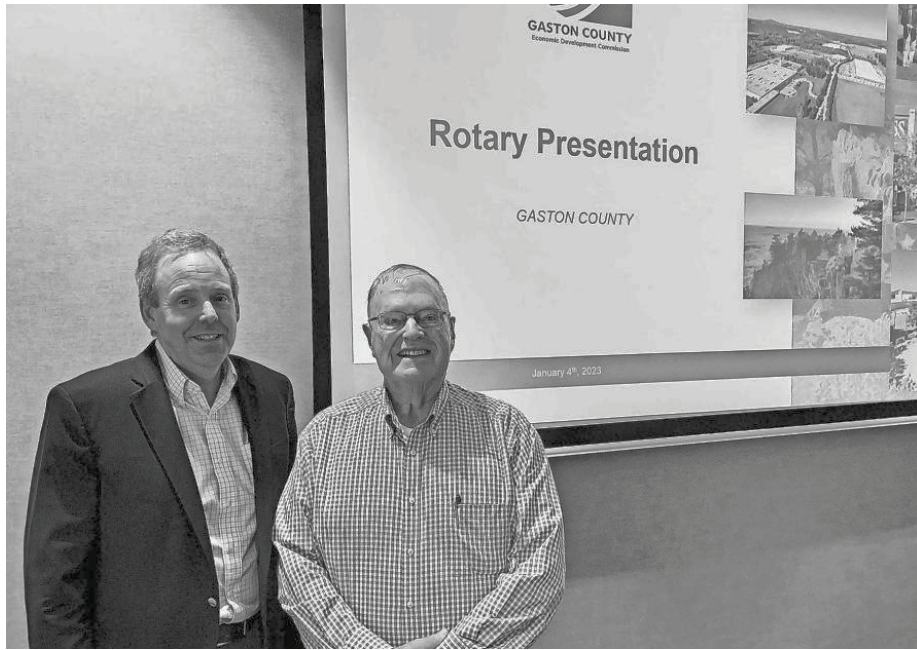
It's almost built out, with 10 current industries and two projects pending. Some of the major employers in the site include Owens Corning, Dixon Quick Coupling, CTL Packaging and Rouchling.

South Ridge Business Park

The seven companies already located in this park help give Bessemer City the second highest municipal tax base in Gaston County. Dole, Hunter Douglas, Amazon and Dhollandia are some of the companies with plants in the park.

Apple Creek Corporate Center

With the Technology Park nearing capacity, the EDC began working to develop another site nearby and the 330-acre Apple Creek Corporate Center is the result on the Dallas-Cherryville Highway.



Gaston Economic Development Commission Executive Director Donny Hicks, left, spoke about the recent industrial development boom in the county during a presentation to the Belmont Rotary Club. Rotarian Dick Cromlish, who arranged the program, is vice chair of the Gaston County Economic Development Commission board. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY BELMONT ROTARY CLUB

Less than a year since the grand opening, five of the 10 available sites in Apple Creek have been, or are being, developed and announcements are expected soon on more. Companies represented in Apple Creek include GNT, Rankin, Knoll, Hans Kissle and Premix.

RiverWest

This is a new and smaller park near the Oaks Commercial Center in North Belmont, but it's having a big impact. Its two buildings total more than 600,000 square feet, and one is fully leased and the other partially leased.

Hicks shared statistics on 22 projects recently completed or under construction. The combined total investment will be more than \$661 million and the square footage totals more than 10 million. The seven completed projects for which employment numbers are available have produced 645 jobs.

The EDC isn't content with its recent major success and continues to work every day to bring more jobs to Gaston County.

Hicks cited a massive 900-acre project on the Gaston-Lincoln border that will be a two-county joint venture. It's called Riverbend Farms and more than half of the acreage will be in Gaston



The 1.5-million-square-foot building in the Gateway 85 business park beside I-85 between Lowell and Gastonia is the Southeast distribution center for Newell Brands, a Fortune 500 company, distributing products such as Rubbermaid, Mr. Coffee, Oster, Calphalon and Sunbeam. Total investment is \$135 million.

County. When developed, it will be one of the largest business parks in the region.

Planning is also under way for a 345-acre business park in the Dallas-High Shoals area.

Belmont Rotary

Rotary is an international service organization with 1.4 million members in more than 200 countries. "Service Above Self" is the Rotary motto. Rotarians work together to promote peace,

fight disease, support education, grow local economies and protect the environment.

Belmont Rotary Club, which will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2025, meets for lunch and a program on local topics each Wednesday, 12:30 - 1:30 p.m., at the Home2 Suites by Hilton in Belmont. Guests interested in learning more about local businesses and issues and how Rotary serves the community are welcome. For more information, visit www.belmontrotaryclub.com.