

## OUR VIEW

# A New York Wire lesson

## Manufacturing is over for counties like Colleton

The New York Wire fiberglass screen manufacturing plant — formerly the CCX plant and before that, the J.P. Stevens plant — will shut down and close up at the end of December. The plant's 224 employees, the last ones left after previous layoffs, will lose their jobs.

None of this comes as a surprise. Still, it's sad to hear. Sad, first, for the employees and their families and, second, for Colleton County's economy, because those employees' paychecks were spent among our local businesses.

Plant closings have been a fact of life in our county for years now. The world has changed so that today, nations' economies are more closely intertwined than ever before. What happens in India or China has immediate repercussions for workers here. The growth of our own economy is close to flat, which means that the laid-off employees will have an even harder time finding similar work, despite the best efforts of the Rapid Response Team to help them with resumes and interviews.

But this closing is an appropriate time for all of us to accept a hard truth: the manufacturing jobs that for so long employed workers in rural Southern counties are increasingly a thing of the past. The people

### EDITORIAL

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who study these things say that the future of communities like Colleton does not include manufacturing goods and products. Gone are the days when one could go from high school to a plant, get on-the-job training, and put in 25 or 30 years before retiring.

That doesn't mean there is no future for the Colleton Counties of the South. It just means that it's going to be different, and our young people and their parents must think differently about what kind of work is going to be out there. We must create our future, first by recognizing national and global trends, and second by training and marketing ourselves to fit within those trends.

That is what Colleton County's economic development director Peter Arnoti and others have been doing, and the future they see heavily involves the moving of those goods and products that are now manufactured elsewhere. That moving of products is an industry in itself, made up of elements including materials handling, warehousing,

logistics and distribution — all parts of making the supply chain work.

And within a decade, the South — at least the portion of the South within a 500-mile radius of Atlanta — is going to see an astonishing increase in the movement of products. The widening of the Panama Canal will be the cause of it, according to the Charlotte-based Material Handling Industry of America. Today, about 25 percent of America's shipping and handling is done within that Atlanta radius, with the greatest part of the remainder taking place on the West Coast. After the canal widening is completed in a few years, the South's percentage will increase to 45 percent of all shipping and handling.

Arnoti says that is what our county must gear itself to and, accordingly, must train our workforce for. We are situated within that 500-mile radius of Atlanta, between two seaports, on the East Coast's major north-south interstate highway, and well within an hour of two east-west interstates.

That is the future our young people ought to be thinking about. If we become very good at the business of meeting crucial elements in the nation's supply chain, we will read far fewer sad stories like the closing of New York Wire.