

# Evaluating development: Three new businesses in Colleton

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More of the same is what Darrell Booker, senior project manager for the Southern Carolina Regional Development Alliance, says Colleton County is hoping for in terms of economic development.

Booker came to the March 7 Colleton County Council session to offer a report on the six-county economic development organization's efforts in 2016 and what can be expected in 2017 in terms of attracting new employers to the region.

Each county in the Southern Carolina Alliance welcomed a new business in 2016.

Of the 10 new companies establishing a presence within the borders of the development agency, three sprouted roots in Colleton County.

The top three counties for business recruitment within the alliance's region — Colleton, Jasper and Hampton — all have I-95 access, Booker pointed out.

In the previous year, Booker said, the Southern Carolina Alliance worked on a total of 104 business recruitment projects. Thirty-one of them were in Colleton County.

Breaking down the status of those 31 projects, Booker said three were announced as moving operations into the county, 15 are still active, three potential projects were placed on hold by the companies and 10 projects were lost.

Booker pointed out that when Colleton County fails to attract a prospective employer, the officials of the Southern Carolina Alliance seek to find out why. "It is one of the important aspects we look at," Booker said. "We want to learn why we are not winning these projects."

Booker reported that four of the companies did not want to disclose their reasons for not choosing Colleton County.

Another four said the county's location resulted the decision to look elsewhere. "We can't do anything about that," Booker said.

The two remaining companies listed utility costs and ability of funding.

Although the sampling is small so far, Booker said, "If we see a trend, we will see what we can do to fix it."

The 10 victories region-wide, Booker said, resulted in a total capital investment of \$112 million and over 287 jobs created.

Colleton County's three wins were:

■ JDBR-Walterboro, a Chinese ball bearing maker dedicating \$7.2 million in capital and anticipating the creation of 55 jobs at its facility at 1310 W. Jefferies Blvd.

■ J&L Wire, a Minnesota company that constructs galvanized wire decking and shelving, came to Walterboro with a \$2.5 million capital investment in a new facility at 387 Mable T. Willis Blvd. that will eventually result in 55 jobs.

■ And BUSCOT, an Italian specialty bearing



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maker, which is investing \$1.5 million to establish operations at 220 Anderson Road that will result in 10 jobs.

The pending arrival of Lowcountry Aviation Company has yet to go into the win column. The company, which plans to offer a wide variety of aviation services at Lowcountry Regional Airport, will have a capital investment of \$3.2 million and expects to have approximately 100 employees.

The early signs for 2017 have been encouraging, according to Booker. "We have seen a good amount of activity," Booker said. "We hope to have some more in 2017."

Southern Carolina Alliance's ability to attract new employers, based on its comparative population and size of South Carolina's other regional development organizations, "has us fighting above our weight class."

Despite that disadvantage, the counties in the Southern Carolina Alliance entered 2017 with 52 active business recruitment projects on-going.

Since the start of the new year, Booker said nine new recruitment projects have been added. Four of those nine new projects, he said, are in Colleton County.

To improve the appearance of the available sites those potential employers will be visiting, Booker said, the state had provided the alliance a \$500,000 grant for site enhancement.

He also pointed out that by the end of this year, construction on an alliance regional office in Hampton County should be completed. That new facility, he added, will result in more "boots on the ground in Colleton County and hopefully create more activity here."