

EDC learns it has a friend at UNCC

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By **Mark Wineka**

mwineka@salisburypost.com

Last month, the Salisbury-Rowan Economic Board of Directors traveled to Kannapolis for an up-close look at the N.C. Research Campus.

This month, the board learned of the potential resource Rowan County has in the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Robert Wilhelm, executive director of the Charlotte Research Institute at UNCC, traveled to Salisbury Wednesday to remind the local board that part of his university's mission is to serve its economic region.

For economic development, Wilhelm said, the university offers diversity in the broadest sense through its people, resources and technical expertise.

UNCC is strong in its faculty and students, workforce instruction, graduate and certificate training and technology, he said.

That diversity is exemplified through UNCC programs such as precision metrology, motorsports and automotive research, information technology, nanotechnology, optoelectronics, biomedical engineering and bioinformatics, Wilhelm said as examples.

He suggested that a UNCC medical school is on the horizon.

In Kannapolis, only 17 miles from the campus, UNCC has a 3,000-square-foot spot reserved on the third floor of the N.C. Research Campus' Core Lab for bioinformatics.

It also has a technology transfer office that is set up to market business incubators and ideas that can be licensed.

Robert Van Geons, executive director of the Salisbury-Rowan EDC, said his agency must integrate the resources available through UNCC into its own marketing materials.

He and other board members said the EDC also should link the resources at UNCC with existing industries in Rowan County.

"We could do a much better job with that," Van Geons said.

Wilhelm said the college's center for real estate also might be able to help the EDC with site evaluation work.

"If you have things you have a need for," Wilhelm said, "don't be bashful. Give me a call."

Despite the struggling economy, the local EDC has continued to see some activity through inquiries and a recent prospect visit.

The EDC is seeing some existing industry expansions, a national retail interest, activity related to two motorsports concerns, two solar projects, interest from a logistics company and a "continued interest in the fairgrounds," Van Geons said.

Prospects have asked about the 52-acre Rowan County Fairgrounds property along with their inquiries into Summit Corporate Center.

A monthly report listed 14 active "projects," with an additional 11 "inquiries."

A project is when a company or its agent has found a location of interest in the county and Rowan is "on the list" of possible places for expansion.

An inquiry is when a company asks about a location that might meet its selection criteria.

In the past month, the EDC has had 10 inquiries and five projects.

"Active projects" would represent 937 new jobs and \$294 million in investment, according to the monthly report.