



Jerry Howard of the GADC and John Baker of the Greenville Business Retention and Expansion Program.

Launch of Greenville Works

a Milestone for County

BY JERRY HOWARD, GADC | PHOTOGRAPH BY COMMERCIAL IMAGING PHOTOGRAPHY

The announcement that the Greenville Area Development Corporation and eleven other public sector organizations – spanning economic development, education, workforce development and public policy – have joined to develop a comprehensive workforce development strategy, is a major step forward for Greenville County.

Such a strategy is essential to develop a next-generation workforce and to enjoy long-term economic success and per capita income growth.

Greenville Works unveiled its plans for an integrated approach to workforce development in late July. Its initial seeds were planted in 2007 when the Business Retention & Expansion Program (BREP) was introduced. BREP was the culmination of long-seated awareness by the Greenville Chamber and GADC of the need for a retention program, with implementation coming to fruition as one recommendation of a community economic development strategy by Market Street.

Since inception, BREP has conducted face-to-face meetings with over 300 Greenville County business owners and executives to determine needs, growth opportunities and trends.

I distinctly recall the overwhelming support voiced by Greenville Tech and the Workforce Investment Board when Ben (Haskew of the Chamber) and I approached them with the idea of funding a first-class business retention program. They shared our vision and appreciated the importance of the effort, coming aboard as founding members of BREP. To date, BREP has educated county businesses on assistance available to them, resolved issues, and led to curriculum additions and workforce development initiatives to support our business community.

The program produces a wealth of insight from companies small and large

on regulatory concerns, taxes, expansion incentives, supply chain needs and – most commonly – workforce challenges, which executives noted impacts their businesses daily and dramatically.

Concerns range from readiness of entry level workers to scarcity of skilled labor in some disciplines to fear over skill losses due to retirement by an aging workforce, and impact their ability to compete globally, to achieve superior quality and productivity, and to compete for internal capital. Without a long-term strategy, Greenville risks foundational industries continuing to erode, and emerging knowledge-based segments flowing to other communities.

This need is the genesis behind Greenville Works. Because workforce development is closely linked to sustainable economic growth and influenced by education, we convened a collaborative of major providers of these services in Greenville County. They responded by contributing to an integrated planning process that addresses both short- and long-term needs of workforce development here.

Members of the group include educational systems (Greenville County Schools, Greenville Tech, and University Center of Greenville); workforce development organizations (Greenville County Workforce Investment Board, SC Employment Security Commission, Personal Pathways to Success, readySC and United Way of Greenville County); and economic development and public policy organizations (the Greenville Chamber, City of Greenville, and ourselves – the GADC).

Each partner committed to provide funding and/or in-kind resources to launch Greenville Works – despite difficult economic times, which underscores the importance each places on a unified strategy for workforce development.

Each partner maintains the responsibilities for which it is chartered, as

Greenville Works' purpose is to reach beyond individual charters to implement approaches no single partner organization can achieve alone.

Greenville Works' strategy will focus on four primary areas:

- » **continuous feedback** from the business community to understand business needs and issues
- » **work with education systems** to develop curricula that prepare the workforce to meet the needs of business
- » **provide career information** to youths and adults to ensure understanding of requirements, opportunities, and career paths
- » **build workforce development programs** to ensure a solid pool of needed skills in target sectors.

Task forces will address primary areas of the plan, focusing on information systems for workforce development, entry level and life-long learning, improving career decision-making, certification and apprenticeship programs, and optimizing industry cluster development and support.

Ultimately, Greenville Works' goal is to help employers draw on qualified resources and talent to meet market demands. Greenville Works will measure success through employer evaluation of labor, capital investment and job creation by industry, and by positive impact on per capita income – all to help Greenville County enjoy better jobs and a brighter future for generations to come.

For information, visit www.GreenvilleWorks.com. ■

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