

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Written By Ray Chandler

When Jim Alexander looks back on his last full year as Oconee County's economic development director he'll know he went out on a win. Despite an economy that made any gains difficult.

Jim announced in August that he would retire at the end of June 2012, leaving the position he's held since 1999.

The brightest note of 2011 was the single largest industrial investment in the county's history,



Available product, or lack there of, was what Alexander advocated most. In 2011, Oconee County took ownership of a 50,000 SF Shell Building, located in the Oconee County Commerce Center. Referred to by one official as "the best Shell Building in South Carolina."

a \$60 million expansion announced in November by BASF.

The high-tech company, which manufactures and distributes precious metal catalysts, chemicals, salts, solutions and chemically precipitated precious metal-activated powders, is expected to add 25 jobs to its Seneca plant. The plant already employs about 350 people.



Aletera Polymers occupies 75,000 SF of the former Propex Facility.

The expansion will be facilitated by a fee-in-lieu-of-taxes agreement brokered by Alexander's office and BASF officials, most prominently BASF plant manager Frank Lamson-Scribner, and approved by the County Council. The arrangement will bring Oconee County approximately \$7 million in fees over 24 years.

The BASF expansion was the product of about four years of talks, and exemplifies the slow-but-steady-wins-the-race strategy that economic development often demands. It was a hallmark of



The ribbon cutting celebrating the Grand Opening of the CollinsCraft Expansion.

Alexander's tenure that he always emphasized the long-term view.

And using all the tools at one's disposal, such as fee-in-lieu agreements and infrastructure tax credits. The latter played a role in helping another company in Oconee County in 2011.

In January, the Ohio-based Altera Polymers announced it was bringing a facility to Oconee County, investing about \$4 million and creating about 75 jobs. A county-approved infrastructure tax credit was one of the deal sealers.

The plant, located in the old Propex building in Seneca, deals with formulation technologies in

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# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEMBERS



Ms. Kim Alexander  
Council District I



Mr. Harold Gibson  
Council District II



Mr. Hank Field, Chairman  
Council District III



Mr. Sammy Dickson  
Council District IV



Mr. Gene Blair  
Council District IV

## Ex-Officio Members



Mr. Scott Moulder, Administrator  
Oconee County



Mr. Art Holbrooks, Director  
Oconee County Planning



Dr. Ronnie L. Booth, President  
Tri-County Technical College



Mr. John Lummus  
VP for Economic Development  
Tri-County Technical College



Dr. Michael Lucas, Superintendent  
School District of Oconee County



Dr. Jeanne L. Ward, President/CEO  
Oconee Medical Center



Mr. Marvin G. Carmichael  
Clemson University



Mr. Robert C. Winchester  
General Superintendent  
Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority



Mr. Jim Gadd, Executive Director  
Oconee Alliance

### EDC Staff Members:

- Jim Alexander, Director
- Russell Johnson, Project & Marketing Manager
- Thelma Miller, Administrative Assistant

## **2012 EDC Meeting Schedule**

The Oconee County Economic Development Commission meets on the third Friday of the month starting at 9:00 a.m. at the EDC office 502 East Main Street, Walhalla, SC. The meetings are open to the public.

**January 20**  
**February 18**  
**March 16**  
**April 20**  
**May 18**  
**June 15**

**July 20**  
**August 17**  
**September 21**  
**October 19**  
**November 16**  
**December 21**

*(Meeting dates are tentative and subject to change)*

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Jim Alexander  
Director

Exceptional!

The past, present and the future are safe ways to approach any annual report but some deviation is necessary when talking about an exceptional year. 2011 provided many good stories and exceptional successes.

It all started with Altera Polymers announcing a location to the former Propex building in Seneca. Barry Rhodes, owner, of this polyolefin and engineered resin operation is positive about the features of the facility that will allow long term business achievements.

The completion of the “shell” building in the Oconee County Commerce Center became an exceptional county economic development tool. Multiple clients and consultants have visited. Excellent reviews included, “Great looking building,” “Super-facility flexibility,” “Floors were a good move,” “Good planning on the 32’ clear ceiling height,” and “Expansion from 50 to 200,000 SF has appeal to a variety of clients.” This building will attract the “right” prospect bringing new jobs and investment in the New Year.

An exceptional opportunity developed with the purchase of 400 acres along Highway 11 creating the Echo Hills industrial park. Infrastructure engineering is complete; the City of Walhalla is lay-

ing pipe and will soon turn on the water for the industrial clients Echo Hills will attract. Sewer right-of-way has been secured and further improvements will be completed this year. Construction has started on an electrical sub-station on the property.

County Council adopted zoning ordinances for all three industrial parks: Oconee County Commerce Center, Echo Hills Park, and the Golden Corner Commerce Park. Their efforts have also established covenants for the Parks.

CollinsCraft Corporation near Westminster is celebrating the new 66,000 square foot facility built to meet additional production endeavors and in the process save twenty-five jobs for Oconee County citizens. Congratulations to Ken Collins and his team for this exceptionally beautiful showplace.

New and exciting for the year was the development of the Mountain Lakes Business Development Corporation. The business incubator program under the leadership of Carl Cliche, Chairman of the MLBDC Board of Directors is designed to accelerate the successful development of entrepreneurial companies and new business start-up projects. The county’s Brown Building in Walhalla will house the incubator facility. The exceptional effort to support small business and entrepreneurial support will help these folks stay in business for the long term.

What does it take to lay claim to an exceptional year? The BASF Corporation made a \$60 Million expansion announcement. The

investment will include 25 new jobs to substantiate the “exceptional year” title. It is believed that the BASF investment is the single largest industrial announcement ever made in the County.

So what about 2012? It is an exciting time in Oconee County and the future of economic development holds more positive steps, I think . . .

- ~ Several members of the industrial family will have expansion news.
- ~ A bold move by County Council will initiate sewer infrastructure in the I-85 region of the county.
- ~ The Golden Corner Commerce Park will get a detailed Master Plan.
- ~ Location for the third “Shell” building will be selected.
- ~ Coordinated efforts with the county, municipalities, and communities will provide numerous opportunities to make good things happen.

2012 will be GREAT Year!



Governor Haley is pictured naming Michael Higgins, Itron, Inc., (middle) South Carolina Ambassador for Economic Development. Also pictured, House Speaker Bobby Harrell (right).

## A WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Mr. Hank Field  
EDC Chairman

Jobs and capital investment are the primary pursuits of the Oconee County Economic Development Department. Success in these two areas is the foundation of a sound local economy. When every man and woman who wants to work is able to find work, small retail and service businesses thrive. When private investment is made in real estate, buildings and equipment, our county is able to function at a reduced cost to individual property owners.

Job creation and attraction of capital investment takes more than wishful thinking and requires a great deal of groundwork and preparation. Just being a great place to live is not enough. We must recognize that in order to attract a growing, job-producing industry base, we must first look within ourselves and find ways to improve our community, our services and our facilities. The days when industry moved into areas where labor was cheap are over.

Today, American industry is driven where the workforce is well educated, self-motivated and precision oriented. Industry seeks to locate itself in communities that have prepared themselves with the utilities it needs and a workforce that is dedicated to quality performance. And, it is willing to pay higher wages to this dedicated workforce.

We are very fortunate to have great leadership in our county and municipal governments, in our representation in the statehouse, in our school district, in our emergency and medical services, in our industry sector, and in our water, power and sewer utilities. Great leadership in these areas is crucial to strong economic development, and we are blessed with ladies and gentlemen with great vision, passion and fortitude. Leaders who know that unless we continuously prepare ourselves for a better future, the future will be bleak. Our leadership is pushing ahead, steadfastly, to place us at the forefront of economic opportunity, and many in the field of industry recruitment and

economic development throughout South Carolina know that we mean business.

We are laying the foundation necessary to take full advantage of an ever-changing industrial paradigm, and a highly competitive industry recruitment market. Our County Council has moved to develop land for industrial, processing and distribution use. Our utilities are moving to supply these areas with their services. We have lengthened the runway at our airport and expanded its services. And perhaps most importantly, our school district is working harder than ever to prepare our young people for the workplace of the future.

It is reassuring to know that as the national economy improves, we are in the proper position to take advantage of it. As this year-end report attests, 2011 was a year of hard work and accomplishment on the part of many Oconeeans. With great pride and confidence, I look forward to more of the same for 2012.

## VOLUNTEERISM KEY FOR ALLIANCE IN 2011



Jim Gadd  
Executive Director

Citizens of Oconee County once again proved that they are willing to work together to improve life in our community.

Implementation of the 2008 – 2028 Vision Plan, Oconee By Choice, continued. A mentoring program matches a volunteer with an eighth student who is selected by the school guidance personnel. The program is designed to encourage students to overcome challenges and to graduate from high school. Volunteers continue to distribute an upcoming events calendar and to sponsor educational programs about conservation and sustainability. Their film series is in its third year. We assisted local industry to develop and con-

duct the 4th annual Business-Industry Showcase at Littlejohn Coliseum. This event gives eighth and ninth grade students in Oconee, Pickens, and Anderson counties the opportunity to talk with members of the local business community in order to learn the skills that they will need to acquire or develop in order to have a successful career.

Since its inception in 2008, the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) has generated an economic impact of over \$5,000,000. Bus tours, fishing tournaments, and visitors have increased significantly and the financial impact from their visits during 2011 was \$2,800,000. Data from the state revealed that Oconee County ranked 9th out of 46 counties in South Carolina in percentage growth of tourism from 2009 to 2010. Our economic impact was up

9.78% and had a positive impact on jobs, payroll, and taxes collected. Finally, our CVB won the prestigious Shining Light Example Award as the Best Performing CVB in the Southeast for CVBs with a budget under \$2,000,000. We were competing with 119 other communities and WE WON!

We continued with our monthly education meetings that are open to the public. Speakers included an economist, several plant managers from local industry, a zoning specialist, and President Jim Barker of Clemson University. We also heard from leaders of non-profits, experts in the fields of healthcare and tourism, and our legislative delegation.

We close 2011 with high hopes for 2012.

# Capital Investment & Job Creation

2011

Company	New/Expansion	Capital Investment	Jobs
Altera Polymers	New	4,000,000	50
Collins Craft	Expansion	1,750,000	5
BASF Catalysts	Expansion	60,000,000	25
<b>Totals</b>		<b>65,750,000</b>	<b>80</b>

2010

US Engine Valve Corporation	Expansion	18,000,000	5
Schnieder Electric	Equip Upgrade	5,000,000	5
Koyo Bearings	FILOT Extension	5,000,000	
<b>Totals</b>		<b>28,000,000</b>	<b>10</b>

2009

Greenfield Industries	Expansion	18,000,000	115
Itron	Equip Upgrade	30,000,000	350
<b>Totals</b>		<b>48,000,000</b>	<b>465</b>

## OPPORTUNITIES from Page 1:

polyolefin, engineered resins and master batch technologies. A portion of the company's feedstock comes from recycled plastics.

In December, CollinsCraft, near Westminster, formally opened its new facility, which holds the promise of 20 additional high-skilled jobs over five years. The new, 66,000-square-foot facility represents an investment of about \$1.75 million.

Looking forward, a new economic development director is expected to be hired early in 2012. Six candidates from many applications were interviewed in December, according to county administrator Scott Moulder. Plans call for the new director to spend some time with Alexander through June getting the lay of the land.

Part of that land will be the county's twin challenges of developing

and marketing the county's two industrial parks, the Golden Corner Commerce Park, off S.C. 59, near Fair Play, and the Echo Hills park, off S.C. 11 in the center of the County. Efforts now focus on getting sewer and water infrastructure to the sites.

They both, in a way, will form part of the legacy Alexander leaves as he retires. It was important, he preached, to have something to sell, and to be ready to move when you have a chance to land a prospect.



Tamassee-Salem Middle School student Dillon Brown attracts a burst of electric energy from a tesla coil to his hand at the A-O-P Business & Industry Showcase.

Independent Mail Photo



The Upstate SC alliance, in partnership with the Oconee County Economic Development Commission, hosted Ed McCallum of McCallum Sweeney Consulting for a Pictured (l-r) Jim Alexander, Director, EDC, Ed McCallum, McCallum Sweeney Consultants, Richard Blackwell, VP, Upstate SC Alliance & Hank Field, Chairman, Oconee County EDC.

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP A PRIORITY MOVING FORWARD



Carl Cliche, Chairman  
Mountain Lakes  
Business Development  
Corporation

The MLBDC is a cooperative initiative of Oconee County and Tri-County Technical College that is designed to recruit, develop and mentor entrepreneurship in the Tri-County Region of Anderson, Pickens and Oconee counties. Alliances have been formed between the South Carolina Small Business Development Centers, SCORE, and Clemson.

Currently, the MLBDC is working with over 200 clients at various stages of small business development. In support of this, an Immersion Program has been developed at Tri-County Tech that helps entrepre-

neurs develop a business plan and to develop a broader set of business management skills. Other initiatives have been started with Clemson that support MLBDC clients in the area of mechanical engineering and architecture.

Five businesses are up and running with over 25 new jobs created in the region. An additional dozen companies are progressing through various stages of start-up.

A crucial achievement of the MLBDC, with the support and cooperation of Oconee County, is the development of small business incubators in the Region. The first incubator opened in January 2012 and begins with 5 new start-ups and approximately 10 new jobs. Another

incubator is being developed in Easley where three entrepreneurs wait to take up incubator space.

Many other initiatives with Clemson University and start-ups are underway that will add more new small start-up companies to the area along with the multiplier of jobs.

The effort could not have been successful in producing new companies and in excess of 50 new jobs without the efforts of the members of the MLBDC Board of Directors, Oconee County, Dr. Ronnie Booth and the staff at Tri-County Technical College. And, in 2012, MLBDC will add many efforts supported by Clemson University to its ability to create new start-ups and jobs.

## CHANGE, CHANGE AND MORE CHANGE

Jim's announcement to retire was not the only change seen around the Economic Development office in 2011. The Mountain Lakes Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) completed its 3 year trial period, successfully. Over the course the CVB increased Accommodations Tax collections by 27% overall and in 2010 alone tourism generated an economic impact of \$47.2 million dollars in Oconee County. As a result of the success, the Oconee Alliance and Oconee County Council unanimously agreed the CVB should continue its mission on a permanent basis.

With the City of Walhalla, under the direction of the Walhalla Partners for Progress, completing a restoration of the "Historic Earle House," space was offered to the CVB to use as Oconee's official Visitor Welcome Center. "It was a perfect solution for the CVB as it provided more than enough room for a visitors center with brochure racks, reception foyer, offices for the growing staff and a conference room," said Ken Sloan, President & CEO of the CVB. "The

CVB accepted the offer and with the EDC's blessings, moved from the EDC office to the Earle House in October of 2011."

The Economic Development Commission served as an incubator of sorts for the CVB during its trial period. "Given the established and limited CVB budget, we could not have afforded office space, so this was a huge benefit to our organization. But the added bonus was that I had

the opportunity to talk with and learn from the EDC staff that enabled both organizations the unique opportunity to better understand the significance of the relationship between the economic development and tourism," said Sloan.

Thus has been the case of 2011. Change came seemingly with the seasons. 2012 brings new challenges and opportunities in Oconee and the TEAM is ready!



The "Historic Earle House" is located on the Corner of South Broad and College Street's in Walhalla, SC. The building houses the Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Walhalla Chamber of Commerce.