

Unique recycling project in national spotlight

County receives 2007 Thomas Muehlenbeck Award for Excellence for EcoComplex venture

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NEWTON - A unique project is successfully turning trash into treasure.

A national organization recently honored the government's EcoComplex adjacent to the Blackburn Landfill near Vale. The Alliance for Innovation presented its 2007 Thomas Muehlenbeck Award for Excellence to Catawba County last month. The award is presented for outstanding achievement to one local government in the nation.

The EcoComplex is designed to promote economic development and create jobs in agriculture and the environmentally friendly "green" industry.

"Catawba County sees tremendous potential, both environmentally and economically, from our EcoComplex and we are very excited as we continue with its development," said Barry Edwards, Catawba County's director of utilities and engineering, who oversees the operation.

The county is partnering and recruiting private industry to locate at the complex.

Waste products from those businesses can be converted into energy.

Gregory Wood Products has operated at the complex since 2005. The company, which employs 93 people, buys more than 5,000 tons of logs each week, adding about \$10 million a year to the local economy.

Another wood-related company, Pallet One, is slated to open at the complex later this year. The company will use the wood waste from Gregory's operations and turn it into wood pallets.

More successes could soon be on the way.

The county is in negotiations with other companies interested in locating at the EcoComplex.

Appalachian State University received a grant for a biodiesel research facility at the complex.

A bioenergy facility that would convert waste products of existing businesses and the landfill to produce steam and heat also is planned.

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