

# Apple announcement gladdens community

By [John Dayberry](#) | Hickory Daily Record

The Rev. Arlie Roten believes God still answers prayers.

For proof, the pastor of Meadow Ridge Baptist Church said people need look no further than Monday's announcement that Apple Inc. will build its new \$1 billion East Coast data center here.

Meadow Ridge is one of seven churches participating in the Maiden Community Prayer Alliance, which along with salvation of souls has been praying for the community's prosperity.

"We feel like this Apple announcement is the result of people praying," Roten said Tuesday while waiting for a haircut at Deaton's Barber Shop on West Main Street.

"God still answers prayers, and He's not through yet."

Roten was among numerous people expressing gratitude a day after the California-based technology giant announced it will build a \$1 billion, 500,000-square-foot data center on 183 acres off Startown Road near its intersection with U.S. 321.

The data center, which Apple is expected to use to add capacity to store and move music, video and movies purchased through its iTunes Web site and its MobileMe service, will employ at least 50 people in full-time information technology positions.

Gov. Beverly Perdue's office estimates the data center, which should be completed late next year, could generate another 250 jobs for people providing services to the plant and more than 3,000 related jobs in the region.

"This is going to be good for the town, which has gone through years of losing jobs," said Deaton's Barber Shop customer Joe McCoy, a Wachovia employee and Maiden resident.

"I hope this is the start of even more good things to come."

Across the street at Maiden Branch Library, patrons Shirley Angel and Gearldeen Bolick said they don't know much about Apple, but know plenty about the need for jobs in Catawba County, where the unemployment rate was 15.5 percent in May.

"This is a wonderful thing, especially if they hire people from around here," said Angel, 76.

"Our town has just about dried up," said the 80-year-old Bolick.

"We need something to make our young people stay here, a reason for them not to go away to find work," she said.

At 15, Maiden resident Adam Holbrook is quite familiar with Apple's products and reputation.

"It's a company that most anyone would recognize," Holbrook said.

"This is exciting, and should be good for the economy."

Library patron LaRa Bembry agreed.

The 51-year-old New Jersey woman, in town visiting her mother and grandfather, said the announcement should

go a long way in renewing the hopes of people worried about lost jobs and the recession.

"I'm looking to come back this way, so I was especially happy to hear about Apple," Bemby said.

"This area needs something to give people hope."

Town Manager William "Todd" Herms said Apple's decision to build here illustrates how diversified the employment base is becoming in Maiden, which has traditionally relied on textile and furniture manufacturing jobs.

In June, furniture maker Ethan Allen announced plans to add more than 300 jobs at its Maiden plant.

"Maiden is already a melting pot of opportunity," Herms said.

"This announcement has put us in the national spotlight.

"Apple is one of the world's most recognized companies. Its decision to locate its East Coast data center here just goes to show how great a place Maiden is to live, work and do business."

Economic development officials outside Maiden are also grateful.

"I call this a transformational announcement because of the impact of the Apple name and the huge investment involved," said Scott Millar, president of the Catawba County Economic Development Corp., which led local efforts to land the data center.

"Apple is one of the pre-eminent names in the world," Millar said.

"To locate that company in our area will carry benefits for generations."

Danny Hearn, president of the Catawba County Chamber of Commerce, said Apple coming to the county is like the first few furniture manufacturers settling here a century ago.

"Something like this could change the landscape of our business sector forever," Hearn said.

"This gets us into an arena where the world's economy is headed.

"We'll always try to attract manufacturers, but we must also expand into niche markets like this.

"We're setting a high mark in Catawba County, and we proved it Monday."