

5 counties promote data center corridor

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

Scott Millar said establishing an information technology corridor stretching northwest from Charlotte could transform the region's economy.

"Partnering with Caldwell, Burke, Alexander and Iredell counties to market this to the world may give all the counties new business opportunities," said Millar, president of the Catawba County Economic Development Corp.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, Millar and other economic development officials from the five counties outlined plans for a North Carolina data center corridor during a marketing event that attracted nearly 40 U.S. site selection consultants specializing in data center locations.

Each of the participating counties has available sites suitable for data center development.

On Wednesday, participants in the third Data Center Information Exchange gathered at the future site of Apple's \$1 billion data center in Maiden.

Construction is under way on the project, the first phase of which is expected to be up and running by late 2010.

Site Selection Magazine, a nationally recognized publication, recently acknowledged a region anchored by financial data centers in Charlotte, Apple in Catawba County, Google in Caldwell County and the state's data center in Rutherford County as an emerging data center cluster that is attracting attention within the industry.

Data Center Knowledge, a Web site that specializes in information for the industry, recently ran an article on the clustering of data centers and referred to the "Apple-Google Data Center Corridor."

North Carolina is also the top state in which to build a data center, according to a report by Tishman Technologies Corp., a New York-based construction management firm.

Tishman rated the state highly for low energy cost, favorable labor conditions and fiber optics infrastructure.

The five-county corridor builds on those advantages with a lack of extreme weather conditions, easy access to major airports and a high quality of life, Millar said.

"This new clustering, along with the well-established communications companies in the corridor — CommScope, Corning Cable Systems and Draka — provides us with a huge marketing opportunity," Millar said.

Harry Whalen, director of the Economic Development Commission of Caldwell County, agreed.

Whalen said the region has the potential to be "the next Quincy," referring to Grant County, Washington, and the success that region has had recruiting data centers.

Whalen said that like fast-food restaurants, data centers tend to cluster.

"When you see a McDonald's, you'll often see a Burger King," he said.

A data center is a facility used to house computer systems and associated components, including telecommunications and storage systems.

California-based Google opened a \$600 million data center in Caldwell County in 2008.

When Apple announced plans for its \$1 billion Maiden data center in July, economic development officials saw magnified potential for a data center corridor in the region.

Apple's arrival in the region also heightened interest on the part of site selection consultants from New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and other cities, Millar said.

Attendance at the Data Center Information Exchange blossomed.

"Eight (consultants) came the first year, 18 came last year and 38 came this year," Millar said.

"We're getting attention."