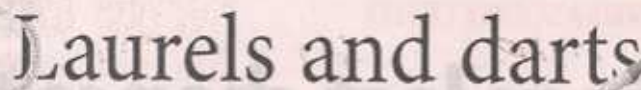


Laurels and darts



Laurels to foresight that helped deliver 900 jobs

LAURELS

Laurels to the foresight of county leaders who saw a great opportunity in the development of an area call center. Developing a 60,000-square-foot facility at the McDonald Crossing Business Park required an investment of \$5 million, although no definite return was ever guaranteed.

This week, that foresight and that investment paid off when Covation LLC announced plans to open a customer-support call center inside the Hickory facility. That company's plans include creation of more than 900 jobs in the next couple of years, and those jobs are expected to pay an annual average that tops the average salary earned by Catawba County workers today. Meanwhile, those jobs are expected to be a shift from what has traditionally comprised Catawba County's workforce. Instead of labor intensive manufacturing jobs, many of the new positions created between April and April 2011 will be customer service and training oriented — and most should be jobs that many Catawba County residents can complete, whether they live in Hickory, Newton, Conover, Maiden, Claremont or outside the county's lines

As the county maintains an unemployment rate above 8 percent, that is important. So, too, is an average salary of \$34,500 per year.

Most important in all this, however, is the fact that leaders in Catawba County are willing to pursue innovative steps to secure jobs for the future. And the jobs being sought are from a diverse spectrum of industries. Seeking these jobs and finding ways to lure employers here will go a long way toward making sure that our entire community has a good opportunity to overcome nearly any difficult economic downturn.