

Target Distribution Center Opens

Written by Gina Lindsey (O-N-E Staff Reporter)

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Target has 500 employees working at its newest distribution center in Newton at the time of the grand opening of the facility on Tuesday with more to come.

“These jobs could not have come at a better time for our citizens,” said Newton Mayor Bob Mullinax.

State and local officials and Target representatives spoke at a ribbon cutting ceremony for the facility. The center, which houses some of the company’s greatest and most covert technological advances, is now fully operational.

And there is room to grow within the 1.6 million-square-foot facility — the size of 35 1/2 football fields — located off N.C. 10 at 1880 Stover Court.

“We have the capability to almost double the capacity,” said Mitch Stover, senior vice president of Target distribution services, referring to increased employment opportunities in the future.

However, the company is not sure how many more people it will hire, said Human Resources Director Sue Gilliam. She said the number of additional jobs will depend on the service demand at the distribution center and possible increases in shipping volume.

The quality of the local workforce was one of the most important factors in Targets decision to locate in Newton, said Stover. He said Newton had the highest scores on assessments of the available workforce in the history of Target.

Stover said other factors included transportation costs and available infrastructure.

Of the 500 hired, Gilliam said the vast majority of the employees came from Catawba County and its neighbors, including Burke, Caldwell and Iredell counties with a few others from Charlotte.

Allan Mackie, manager of the Hickory office of the N.C. Employment Security Commission said it's good news for a region that continues to suffer more than 15 percent unemployment.

The employees were hired from a pool of more than 14,000 applications received during the distribution center's three-day job fair held March 19-21, said Rick Scholtes, general manager of the Newton distribution center.

The Target facility in Newton is one of 26 regional distribution centers in 20 states. Its employees are responsible for receiving shipments from suppliers and shipping products directly to about 60 Target stores north of Charlotte and into Virginia.

The distribution center opened to its first employees on March 2 and began receiving shipments in May, while its first outbound shipments started in June. The goal was to have the site fully functional in time for the Christmas rush, Scholtes said in March.

The grand opening of the Target facility is the pivotal moment for all the people involved in the project during the last five years. Three years ago the company announced its plans for a new distribution center in Newton for its latest distribution center with an anticipated investment of \$85 million, said Julie Pruett, director of business recruitment with Catawba County Economic Development Corp.

Scholtes said the company has already surpassed the amount, though he wouldn't say by how much.

The facility is also expected to add about \$1 billion to Newton's tax base, said Sen. Kay Hagan (D-NC).

"I don't think I have to explain to anyone what the Target Distribution Center means to Newton," she said.

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