

Apple Prepares to Dig In



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

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Construction on Apple's \$1 billion data center in Maiden is due to begin in the next few weeks and may even put some skeptics to rest.

"Obviously bulldozers are a clear indicator of progress," said Scott Millar, president of Catawba County Economic Development Corp.

However, a specific date for the groundbreaking has not been set, said Apple spokesperson Susan Lundgren for corporate public relations.

While some people continue to doubt Apple's commitment to build a 500,000 square-foot data center in Maiden's WestStar Business Park, officials say it's a done deal.

"We did land on the moon, Elvis did die and Apple is coming to Maiden, North Carolina," said Maiden Town Manager Todd Herms.

Millar said the EDC is finalizing the last details.

"We're just tying up loose ends," he said.

Apple has signed economic development contracts, outlining incentives packages with Maiden and Catawba County. However, the computer company has not closed on the 183-acre property, located off Startown Road near U.S. 321. The property address, 5977 still lists owners as Wayne M. Bach and Donald C. Beaver, although it only represents a portion of the land Apple intends to buy.

"There were probably still people out there saying Target won't happen until this week," Millar said referring to Tuesday's ribbon cutting, celebrating the opening of its Newton-based distribution center. "It's always interesting to watch the entire project, knowing about it long before anyone else and watching it until it's complete and hires (the first employees). Certainly Target is a good example of a project taking several years to construct and then hire. I do believe there were people at the onset of the Target project that said it would never get built. Of course those people are incorrect today, and there are 500 people there who are happy we pursued and persevered. "

Apple will likely be the same. People won't believe it until it's built, Millar suggested.

Herms is just hoping the weather cooperates so Apple can stay on schedule. The facility is due to be completed by late December 2010, according to Apple representatives. When the building is finished, the company will begin hiring about 50 employees from the area after its already stimulated the economy through a state estimated 3,000 spin-off jobs in construction, maintenance and other fields.

The site, and Apple's largest data center to date, will provide technology support for Apple's iPhone and iTunes music store, as well as inter-company communications.

Maiden recently annexed the property into town limits. Herms is just excited the project is moving forward and how it will benefit the town.

"Apple is great," he said. "It's a feather in everybody's cap. It will lay the foundation for the future of Maiden."

Herms said there was a tentative groundbreaking scheduled for Aug. 25 at the future Apple site. However, he said that has been postponed to September or October as Maiden and county officials and Apple representatives try to coordinate a date and time that works for everyone.

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