

Auto-parts maker to bring work to Caldwell, Catawba

From Staff Reports

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A Canadian auto-parts giant expects to create 320 jobs during the next four years at three North Carolina plants.

About 140 of the new jobs will be in Caldwell and Catawba counties.

Gov. Beverly Perdue's administration said Monday it had offered Magna Composites LLC, a division of Magna International, \$1.1 million in state tax breaks to expand factories in Rowan, Catawba and Caldwell counties.

The largest of the three North Carolina plants in Rowan County is expected to add about 180 jobs. The Caldwell County plant will add about 130 jobs, and the Catawba County site will add 10 workers.

Bob Brownlee, a Magna executive, said the three plants already have 360 employees.

"We're pleased that North Carolina recognizes the need for business-friendly programs, and it helps us remain in close proximity to our customers in this region," Brownlee said in a press release.

State officials agreed to offer the incentives as long as the company pays average wages of at least \$30,017 plus health care and other benefits at the plants. That wage is below the local average of \$35,048 in Rowan County and \$32,500 in Catawba, according to the state Commerce Department. Caldwell County's average wage is \$28,340.

All three counties have unemployment rates higher than the statewide average. Caldwell County's jobless rate was 14.5 percent in April, the most recent period available. Catawba County's unemployment rate was 12.8 percent and Rowan County's 11.9 percent.

Magna spokesman Scott Worden said the three plants produce a type of reinforced plastic parts for automobile exteriors.

Magna International operates 240 manufacturing plants in 25 countries.

Last month, state officials promised \$127,000 under a different incentive program to a textile company that plans to pay workers about \$2 above the minimum wage on average. Advanced Textile Solutions could collect the grant if it creates 127 jobs in Sawmills in Caldwell County paying an average of \$19,000 per year.