

Company expansion brings 500 jobs to Claremont

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Five hundred jobs and \$16.8 million will come to Claremont over the next three years with an expansion of Pierre Foods.

Gov. Bev Perdue announced the company's expansion Friday, which was made possible through a \$600,000 grant from the One North Carolina Fund.

"I can't fix the federal finance problem, but what I do know is we can do stuff here (in North Carolina)," Perdue said.

The One North Carolina Fund is a performance-based incentive to attract business ventures and create jobs throughout the state. The grant is a joint venture between state and local governments. Companies are required to meet job creation and retention requirements and are given no money up front.

The 500 jobs, when added to the more than 700 jobs currently at Pierre Foods in Claremont, will make the company one of the top five private employers in Catawba County.

Pierre Foods is a Cincinnati-based meat processor that creates ready-to-eat sandwiches. The Claremont facility produces 1 million sandwiches every day.

The company will expand its Claremont facility by 45,000 feet, an increase of about 40 percent, said Pierre Foods CEO Bill Toler. The physical expansion of the facility will take six to nine months.

The environment in Claremont was right for an expansion, he said.

"We just have a feeling that this is the right place," Toler said.

Claremont's high-quality workers and the Pierre Foods' partnership with city and county leaders make the expansion the right decision, he said.

Claremont Mayor David Morrow was thrilled the company chose to expand in the city. The expansion will bring jobs and revenue to Claremont, as well as optimism.

"Anytime you're talking about 500 jobs, it's going to give people some kind of uplifting feeling," Morrow said.

The 500 new employees will start as entry-level workers, with the possibility of advancing as time progresses.

"That's how we do it at Pierre Foods," said Ted Karre, vice president of Packaging and Operations.

The new positions pay \$8 an hour, an average salary of \$26,461 a year with benefits, according to the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation.

North Carolina Congressman Ray Warren said he was glad to see more jobs coming to the state.

“Jobs are important here,” Warren said. “Hopefully some of my folks will be able to get jobs here.”

Nell Jarvis, human resources manager at Claremont’s Pierre Foods facility, said she has seen the company transition and grow for many years. Jarvis has worked with Pierre Foods 22 years of the company’s 30 years in Claremont.

“I remember when we only had 125 workers,” she said. “It’s been a wonderful journey.”

Morrow said the expansion will bring jobs similar to the blue-collar jobs lost in Catawba County in the past.

“The jobs will help not just the people of Claremont, but also the people of Catawba County,” he said.

Perdue is optimistic about the state’s economic opportunities in the future.

“For North Carolina, there are rosy days ahead,” she said.

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