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MSC at Conover

By LaDonna Beeker

onenews@observernewsenterprise.com [2]

Conover Station will welcome a new form of manufacturing to its site after \$2.7 million in grants closed a deal that could potentially bring numerous jobs to Catawba County.

Manufacturing Solutions Center, currently located at Catawba Valley Community College's East Campus, takes backyard ideas and creates a product to be sold across the world.

"The Manufacturing Solutions Center will become the business accelerator for new product innovation both in and outside textiles," said Conover Mayor Lee Moritz Jr. "When companies launch their businesses from this facility, our hope is they will plug into our local communities, use our available industrial properties and employ our skilled and able workforce."

To place MSC at Conover Station by 2012, three grants were awarded. They include \$1 million from the North Carolina Department of Commerce;

\$200,000 from Golden Leaf Foundation; and \$1.5 million from the U.S. Department of Commerce. Conover Station received \$3.5 million, to date, for infrastructure and environmental funding, which makes the total amount in grants at \$6.2 million for the overall project.

MSC is a nonprofit organization that functions through the North Carolina Community College System and has 18 full-time employees and 19 part-time workers.

The organization started 20 years ago in the hosiery business, but has expanded. MSC now works with medical devices, motorcycles, textiles, upholstery, plastics, furniture, biotech and green manufacturing, to name a few.

"Manufacturing Solutions Center has a real partnership with Conover Station," said Dan St. Louis, MSC director. "Nobody does what we do in the community college system."

The new MSC building at Conover Station will be 30,000 square feet, which is 10,000 square feet larger than MSC's current building in Hickory, and is a single-story facility.

In 2009, a survey completed by that National Institute of Standards and Technology showed 1,039 jobs retained or added in eight years thanks to MSC's help in communities. The total economic impact during the same time span was more than \$105 million in the nation. To show continuous improvement, from April to June, MSC created or saved 187 jobs and had an economic impact of \$22 million in the United States.

With at least 250 customers worldwide, except Antarctica, St. Louis said MSC helped many companies save money by testing products, training employees, developing products, marketing and engineering. Customers are found in the United States, except Montana, New Mexico, Mississippi and New Hampshire. In North Carolina, there are about 45 counties that obtain services from MSC.

A few top-name companies utilizing MSC are LL Bean, Costco, Sears and Rubbermaid.

Even though MSC assists brand-name corporations, they are also there for average people with large ideas to help them create a marketable product and sometimes even end up on Oprah or QVC.

It's MSC's unique partnership with the business community that attracted it to Conover Station.

"The goal of Conover Station is to redevelop an unusable piece of property into a mixed-use sustainable development," Moritz said. "This would include cultivating a new form of manufacturing. Manufacturing that is based in smaller and smarter factories that nourish innovation. The catalyst for the new manufacturing economy is Manufacturing Solutions Center."

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Manufacturing Solutions Center will expand its operation by taking a seat in Conover Station by 2012 thanks to \$2.7 million in grants.

CONOVER, N.C.

o-n-e editor

Observer News Enterprise

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