

# Hickory area has all the right business qualities

As our region struggles to break free from an economic downturn that has diminished the job and housing opportunities for many, we look desperately for hope.

Fortunately, it is out there.

Three items, in particular, have us optimistic that better days are ahead: Our quality of life, our entrepreneurial spirit, and the hard-working people who share our message.

The beauty and tranquility of our region can easily be taken for granted.

We cannot afford to do so.

Those in attendance at the Catawba County Chamber of Commerce Economic Outlook breakfast last week heard a great deal about the challenges we face in coming months.

We also clearly heard why one entrepreneur chose to be part of this community.

Michael Neely works in the digital animation field. He has some impressive credentials, including time at EA Sports, where computer games such as Madden NFL are created.

Neely said he chose to work in the town of Newton for one simple reason: Quality of life.

From our unclogged highways to our pace of life to the lakes and mountains that surround us, this is a glorious place to call home. Neely gets it. Others do, too. Companies want to build in communities where employees want to live. We have traveled many places. We have found no better place to live than here.

The Hickory area is also blessed with a can-do spirit. Maybe it can be traced to all the start-up furniture and textile companies. Maybe we just attract people with a vision and know-how.

Whatever the reason, Hickory remains a business town.

We are competitive. We work hard. We achieve.

Few regions can match us in that arena.

We have great people and a great place. That's not enough.

We also need smart people to share our message.

Again, we are fortunate.

Our region has some of the top economic recruitment and planning people in the state. We need look no further than the 1,100 jobs created by the Convergys and Fiserv call centers, the planned \$1 billion, nine-year investment by Apple, and the Target distribution center's 580 jobs to see the results of our economic voices.

The best part? They are not satisfied.

As we move forward in 2011 and beyond, smart business leaders will continue to look for desirable places, motivated people and the right relationships when deciding where to build or expand their business.

We have all those qualities.

Despite the challenges of today, that is a recipe for future success.