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Catawba County EDC officials: Let's capitalize on recent successes

By Sharon McBrayer

Catawba County Economic Development Corporation officials told members during the organization's annual meeting on Wednesday that the area should capitalize on its strengths to create more jobs in the future.

The organization also paid homage to Gary Laws, who was serving as the organization's chairman of the board of directors when he died unexpectedly last year.

Laws was posthumously awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine by Gov. Beverly Perdue, which was presented to his wife, Jeanne, and children, Shane and Courtney, on Wednesday.

A scholarship fund, which has \$20,000 in it, also has been established in Laws' name that will help needy students attend the NC Engineering Camp, which is held at the NC Center for Engineering Technologies. His family also was presented with a custom rocking chair in honor of Laws serving as chairman of the Greater Hickory Classic Foundation. The same type of rocking chair presented to the Laws family on Wednesday is presented to the winner of the tournament each year.

Jeanne Laws accepted the awards, saying it was a joy to share approximately 46 years with Gary and called him "a very good husband, father and papaw."

After the presentations, officials touted the organization's success over the last fiscal year — 799 jobs and more than \$47.5 million investment announced — and talked about the economic future for the county.

Tony Rose, who stepped in as chairman of the organization after Laws' death, introduced the new chairman, Joe Beaman, to the audience.

Beaman said headlines say the area has many years before it returns to where it was before the current recession hit.

"Friends, we on this board are not willing to wait that long," Beaman said.

Scott Millar, president of the county EDC, told the crowd that one of the coolest things to happen to the county was when Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, showed off the Apple data center in Maiden during a conference in June. The data center will support the company's wireless service iCloud.

Millar said the iCloud will drive the data center movement and data centers will continue to be an opportunity for the county.

In addition to data centers and possible support businesses that might be created, there also are opportunities in the energy and manufacturing sectors, he said. He pointed out the energy and alternative energy businesses or entities that have

already taken root such as Turbocoating and Turbotec and the county's Eco-Complex.

The area also has traditionally been a manufacturing center and the county is still an area for quality doers and makers, Millar said. It has wonderful support from places like Manufacturing Solutions Center, the business school at Lenoir-Rhyne University and existing industry networking, he said, and the area needs to take advantage of the attributes it has had for a long time.

Beaman ended the meeting by saying he maintains that the county always emerges stronger when it's been tested, and he is sure it will emerge stronger out of the current economic recession.