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[Home](#) / [news](#) / [local](#) /

Company to create 62 jobs in Hickory

By The Record Staff

A leading manufacturer of fan wheels and blowers is coming to Hickory, bringing 62 new jobs to the city.

Gov. Bev Perdue announced Wednesday that Punker LLC will locate a new manufacturing plant in Hickory. The project will require a \$4.2 million capital investment. The project was made possible in part by a \$78,100 grant from the One North Carolina Fund.

“Creating jobs is my top priority, and North Carolina’s excellent workforce has the knowledge and skills that global companies demand,” Perdue said in a news release. “Businesses looking for new locations quickly discover how much North Carolina deserves its top national rankings as one of the best places to do business.”

Punker manufactures centrifugal fan wheels used for heating, cooling, cooking, ventilation and extraction. The company offers air ventilation solutions for a variety of applications. Punker employs around 300 employees at its main facility in Germany. The project will allow the company to transfer all existing U.S. business from Germany to the Hickory plant.

Salaries will vary by job function, but the average annual wage for the new jobs will be \$35,850, plus benefits, Perdue’s office reported. The Catawba County average annual wage is \$34,216.

According to the Catawba County Economic Development Corp., the future Punker site is at 914 25th St., SE, near Catawba Valley Medical Center. The EDC says the number of new hires could reach 80 over the next five years.

The company is a subsidiary of Punker GmbH and is headquartered in Eckernförde, Germany. Punker has more than 1,000 customers worldwide representing more than 100 different market sectors. The company was founded in 1954.

“We welcome Punker to our large family of German-owned companies in Catawba County,” said Kitty Barnes, chair of the Catawba County Commissioners. “We thank Punker for choosing Hickory and Catawba County and appreciate that Punker’s automated process will offer another diversified manufacturing opportunity for our citizens.”

Hickory Mayor Rudy Wright also welcomed the news. “Today, we add another manufacturer to our long list of international industries,” he said.

“Punker is an industry leader in Europe and we look forward to watching them grow and create new jobs in Hickory. Even more importantly, lives will be changed for a number of our hard-working citizens and their families.”

“We are looking forward to establishing our U.S. production facility in Hickory, North Carolina. The location is very pleasant and close to our customers,” said Dr. Henning Baehren, chairman and CEO of Punker. “The state and county representatives did a great job presenting information about state and county and showing us around the city. They impressed us with their professionalism and attention to our needs.

“We are grateful we were able to work with them through the process of site selection and we are looking forward to

continue to do so in the future.”

“We’ve been working with Punker since July as they scouted the southeast and Ohio for their first US manufacturing operation,” said Julie Pruett, director of Recruitment for the EDC. “Our workforce, transportation networks and low cost business environment makes Catawba County particularly attractive to manufacturing clients. Punker is going to be a great addition to our already established cluster of German-owned manufacturers in Catawba County.”

EDC President Scott Millar said, “This is an awfully good opportunity for us.” Hickory got the nod from Punker over another possible location in Ohio.

The One North Carolina Fund provides financial assistance, through local governments, to attract business projects that will stimulate economic activity and create new jobs in the state. Companies receive no money up front and must meet job creation and investment performance standards to qualify for grant funds.

These grants also require and are contingent upon local matches. Money for the project from Catawba County and Hickory has not been approved. The amount from the county is expected to be finalized and approved by commissioners at their Dec. 19 meeting. Hickory City Council is expected to follow suit on its share at the Dec. 20 meeting.

The One North Carolina Fund has helped create more than 55,000 jobs and \$11 billion in investments since 2001. Other partners that helped with this project include the state Department of Commerce, the NC community college system, Catawba County, the City of Hickory and Duke Energy.

For more information about Punker, including job opportunities, go to www.punker.com.