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During fiscal year 2009-10, companies announced investments in Catawba County totaling more than \$1 billion.

Those investments amount to 1,495 new jobs and 702 officially retained jobs, according to a recent publication from the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation.

EDC president Scott Millar said the county accomplished a lot in the previous fiscal year, but there's still a lot to be done before confidence returns completely to the area.

The EDC's big accomplishment for fiscal year 2009-10 was securing Apple's \$1 billion investment in Maiden for its 500,000-square-foot data center.

Millar said the data center is now open for business and will submit employment statistics in the coming year, when it's time for the company to apply for an incentives package.

Economic development accomplishments continued in late 2009 with the opening of Target's distribution Center, completion of Poppelmann Plastics' \$8-million facility expansion and Conover's receipt of a \$200,000 grant for redevelopment of the Warlong Glove facility.

In early 2010, Convergys announced plans to hire an additional 120 workers at its Hickory customer service facility. Pierre Foods announced in March a \$17-million expansion to the company's Claremont facility, which will retain Pierre Food's existing 700 jobs and create an additional 500 jobs.

These job creations and company expansions, however, weren't enough to pull Catawba County out of crippling unemployment.

"Unemployment is going to be a chronic problem for a long time," Millar said. "We have a challenge, and we recognize that challenge. We're taking aggressive steps to improve it."

Millar outlined several development opportunities for the county's future, including the development and creation of data center locations throughout the county.

The Catawba Corporate Data properties are located near Shurtape on Oxford School Road, which is a few miles outside Catawba's town limits.

That property is within half a mile from Interstate 40, with between 240-750 acres available.

Another data center, the Catawba County Data Center Park No. 2, is located near Lyle Creek, which is less than a mile from I-40. Millar said the EDC hopes to continue development within the coming year.

"Every industry out there is going to have some storage needs," Millar said. "We see that as an opportunity."

Most companies today need some type of data storage, and the county's ready-to-fit data center sites are available for companies who need storage space immediately.

"The reason Apple came here is because we had the park cleaned up, analyzed and proofed, so to say," Millar said. "Those companies, they've got to have it yesterday."

Millar said Catawba County is groomed for data-center sites, with its proximity to Maiden's Apple data center, Lenoir's Google data center, as well as the area's proximity to Charlotte and Winston-Salem.

As always, the EDC looks to recruit new companies to the area bringing new jobs and retaining existing employment.

And that doesn't mean recruiting only large, technology-based companies.

"Clearly, I want us to keep manufacturing things," Millar said. "I think we have to have a very broad and diversified base."

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Catawba County Economic Development Corporation president Scott Millar speaks about the organization's recent accomplishments and goals for the future.

CATAWBA COUNTY, NC

O-N-E Staff Writer

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