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Published on *The Observer News Enterprise* (<http://www.observernewsenterprise.com>)

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## Economic leaders discuss future

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Created 07/20/2011 - 9:59pm

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In the last fiscal year, worldwide conglomerates, like Apple Inc., have made million-dollar investments in Catawba County municipalities. In that same time, homegrown companies, like Lee Industries and Dalco Nonwovens, announced and enacted planned growth to their businesses — bringing more jobs and revenue to the local and county governments.

In total, the county saw about \$47.5 million invested and 800 jobs created during the 2010-11 fiscal year.

But the county's economic leaders say area development is not over, and say there are several economic opportunities that still have room to grow.

Catawba County will target job creation and investments in information technology, energy and manufacturing during the next fiscal year, county economic leaders announced Wednesday.

Leaders of the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation reviewed last year's successes and talked about the future with more than 100 municipal leaders, business owners and many others Wednesday at its annual meeting at the Hickory Convention Center.

Former EDC chair Tony Rose publically handed over his duties onto incoming chair Joe Beaman, who said the county will emerge from the country's economic downfall in better shape.

"We will seek to enrich the quality of life in Catawba County," Beaman said. "I can ensure you of EDC's effort to provide opportunities in the future."

The main "opportunity" that EDC leaders discussed was data center and information technology expansion. Because of the recent successes in the "N.C. Data Center Corridor" that Catawba County hubs, EDC President Scott Millar said data center operators continue to focus on the region.

Primarily, these successes have been large, single-user data center facilities that reside as stand-alone, high-investment, low-moderate employment centers, according to EDC documents. The most well-known data center investment has come from Apple Inc., which completed a \$1 billion data center in Maiden in October 2010. Millar said that brand-name investments, like Apple's, can be a catalyst for more opportunities in the region.

"There are a lot of opportunities on that data center front that we have not gotten to yet," Millar said. "A lot of other communities realize what a data center is now, and they didn't three or four years ago. We have to keep pushing ahead of the curve to stay ahead of the other copycats."

The EDC will also target opportunities in energy, and emerging energy, development.

Millar said energy, alternative energy and emerging energy solutions are projected to grow nationally and internationally as a result of new technologies. With existing facilities like the county's EcoComplex, the EDC feels energy is a great opportunity for growth.

Last year, Turbocoating Corp. USA was an emerging energy business to invest in this area. Turbocoating, an European market leader in coatings for the gas turbine industry, announced that it will open its first U.S. operation in Hickory — an investment that will create more than 110 new jobs with an annual average wage of \$50,000.

The EDC also hopes to target manufacturing in Catawba County throughout the next year, an industry historically linked to the area, Millar said.

Millar called the area "America's center for doers and makers," saying that Catawba County has been a quality-oriented, non-union, low-tax environment for years. The EDC hopes to use the more than 500 manufacturers based in Catawba County to re-vitalize manufacturing opportunities in the area, Millar said.

For more information about the EDC, visit [catawbacountyedc.org](http://catawbacountyedc.org).

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HICKORY, N.C.

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Observer News Enterprise

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