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[Home](#) > Manufacturer bringing jobs to county

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## Manufacturer bringing jobs to county

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A German-based manufacturer of fan wheels and blowers will bring at least 62 jobs to Catawba County when it opens a new manufacturing plant in Hickory.

Punker LLC produces fan parts for the HVAC and exhaust industries. The company's Hickory plant will be its first manufacturing operation in the United States, according to a release from the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation (EDC). Plans for the plant were announced Wednesday.

"We welcome Punker to our large family of German-owned companies in Catawba County," said Kitty Barnes, chairwoman 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."

Punker will invest \$4.5 million in the area and create at least 62 and as many as 80 jobs in the next five years. The average annual salary of the positions will be more than \$35,000, just higher than the average wage in Catawba County. The first phase of hiring will begin in the coming weeks.

The company will earn local incentives based on job creation and investment performance standards.

Punker, a subsidiary of Punker GmbH, is headquartered in Eckernforde, Germany, and manufactures fan parts for more than 1,000 customers on every continent, according to the EDC. The company also manufactures cooling systems, roof fans, dust and smoke extraction and commercial ovens.

Henning Baehren, chairman and chief executive officer of Punker, said the company looks forward to expanding to the United States, and Hickory in particular.

"The location is very pleasant and close to our customers," Baehren said. "The state and county representatives did a great job presenting information about the state and county and showing us around the city. They impressed us with their professionalism and attention to our needs."

Punker employs 300 people in Germany.

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

EDC officials said they started working with Punker in July as the company scouted Ohio and Southeast states for a location for the manufacturing plant.

"Our workforce, transportation networks and low-cost business environment makes Catawba County particularly attractive to manufacturing clients," said Julie Pruett, director of recruitment for EDC. "Punker

is going to be a great addition to our already established cluster of German-owned manufacturers in Catawba County."

A \$78,100 grant from the One North Carolina Fund helped pay for the project to locate the company in Hickory. The 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 performance standards to qualify for funding. Grants also require local matching funds.

Apply for a job

Call the Catawba County office of the N.C. Department of Commerce Division of Employment Security at 828-466-5535. Visit [www.punker.com](http://www.punker.com) <sup>[2]</sup> for more about the company.

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