

THE LIFE OF A PROJECT

HOW INDUSTRY COMES TO CUMBERLAND COUNTY

BY BRITTANY TSCHIDA ODOM

Have you ever wondered what it takes to bring industries like American Titanium Metal, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company and Foundever to our community? The short answer is available real estate, adequate utilities, and a qualified workforce, but that's just the beginning.

The projects we work with come from a variety of places. Our network includes site selectors, brokers, utility partners, the NC Southeast Partnership, and local businesses. Often, when a company is interested in relocating or expanding operations to North Carolina, they start by contacting the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) who gathers information regarding their industry, site or building requirements, and utility needs. That inquiry is then passed on to the regional or local economic development offices across the state.

Once the Fayetteville Cumberland Economic Development Corporation (FCEDC) receives a lead, we work to match the client with a qualifying building or site for the company and build a comprehensive response. While we have a handful of available buildings, specific size, ceiling height, and utility requirements narrow the field.

When selling our community, we focus on the positive traits that set us apart from our competition: our skilled workforce, international diversity, affordable operation costs, and youthful population. Add to this the highly skilled soldiers transitioning out of the military and into civilian careers, as well as our advantageous location along Interstate 95, halfway between New York and Miami, and we have a powerful story to tell.

Sometimes projects come to us through a formal process. Other times the opposite is true. Recently, Project Crossfit, also known as Yeadon Fabric Domes, came across our community on their own and called us directly.

"While traveling to Lumberton for a visit, we discovered Fayetteville and Cumberland County and were curious what the community had to offer," said Matt Mejia, CEO of Yeadon Fabric Domes.



We also connect with projects through our relationships with site selectors and national real estate brokers who are hired to represent a company during their search. Our team has put significant effort into building strong ties with developers, brokers and consultants, which are responsible for a significant part of our deal flow.

"The team at FCEDC is dedicated and made sure there wasn't a stone unturned during our search," said Street Jones, Treasurer of SIOR Carolinas Chapter. "Because of that, we were able to secure a building for our project."

After a company has learned more about our community, they arrange a visit to see everything firsthand. This is when our utility partners, educational institutions, and community leaders come together to answer specific questions they may have. In addition to visiting the site or building they are considering, we have the opportunity to showcase all that Fayetteville and Cumberland County have to offer. If the visit goes well, this is typically when conversations about local and state incentives start.

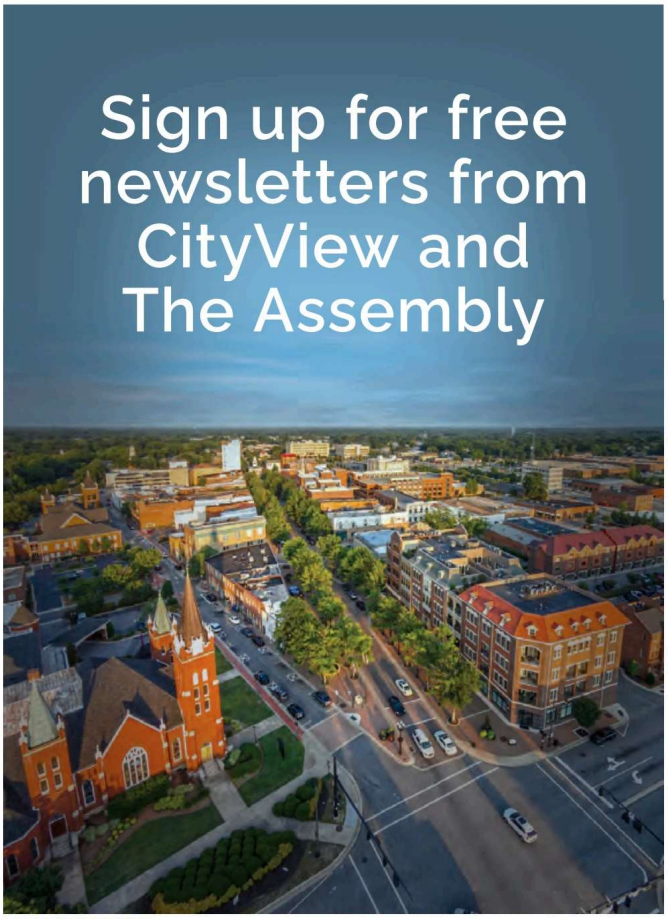
After the required public hearings, if the company ultimately selects us, we move to an official announcement. Following the press conference and ceremonial turning of dirt is when the real work begins. Large projects can take months to permit and years to build. Importantly, no incentives are granted until after the company has made the investment, created the required jobs, and paid their property taxes. If a company fails to meet projections, their incentive will be reduced or cancelled. We require that all recipients document performance prior to payment.



FCEDC takes a proactive approach to securing project leads by attending various trade shows, conferences, and one-on-one consultant events. The SelectUSA Investment Summit in Washington

D.C. is an annual event where we have a presence in front of more than 2,000 companies from over 90 international markets. Another important event is the Society of Industrial and Office Realtors (SIOR) Carolinas Spring/Fall Conferences, which provide us with the opportunity to make personal connections with multi-state brokers. We specifically target events were our message can stand out, focusing on audiences in the technology, defense, and innovation sectors.

"We want to be the expert and trusted voice in a small room, as opposed to trying to out shout our competition on the convention center floor." said FCEDC President & CEO, Robert Van Geons. "In economic development, your reputation and relationships are your currency. Our team values both."



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About Robert Van Geons

Since 2017, Robert Van Geons has been President and CEO of the Fayetteville Cumberland County Economic Development Corporation, announcing more than $1.5 Billion in new investment and 5,000 jobs, with international and domestic companies.

His team is committed to building a dynamic and business-friendly community, leveraging next-generation technologies and a uniquely skilled workforce. Prior to moving to Fayetteville, he worked in both Economic Development and Land Use Management, serving communities in Connecticut and North Carolina. He has had the privilege of being directly involved in the creation and preservation of over 10,000 jobs and $3.7 billion of announced investment.

He received his Master of Science in Economic Development from the University of Southern Mississippi and his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science at Catawba College. He has also earned his Certification in City/County Management from the UNC School of Government, is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma's Economic Development Institute and is a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD). He has also been recognized as one of the Charlotte Business Journal's 2009 "40 under 40" and one of the "Top 50 Economic Developers in North America" by Consultant Connect.

Favorite Quote

"There is a destiny which makes us brothers; none goes his way alone. All that we send into the lives of others comes back into our own."

Edwin Markham

Q&A with Robert Van Geons

President/CEO of the Fayetteville Cumberland Economic Development Corporation

What is your vision for the economic future of this region?

Fayetteville and Cumberland County can be the center for applied innovation. There are places with a higher concentration of PhDs and also other places that can get by with the strength of their physical labor, but if you need a place with a talented workforce that can manufacture high tolerance, highly technical products, that's our community here. I can see us being the alpha stage deployment of new technologies where a great idea goes to build traction and real world experience.

What are your top 3-5 economic development priorities?

With the recent successes we've used up the existing inventory for industrial sites so ensuring that our community has the real estate product necessary to compete and win in the future would be a priority. It would be to see the expansion and integration of advanced technology in our local economy increasing the number of jobs and opportunities for our citizens within those industries. Also, I think ensuring that we have a clear path for our students and our transitioning military to secure highly lucrative, next generation jobs is vitally important.

How do you envision this region competing in the global marketplace?

Our international diversity within our community is one of our greatest strengths and one of our biggest differentiators when talking about similar size peers. We have 85 languages spoken in our schools. We also have strong ties through Fort Bragg to units and communities around the world especially in our Allied Nations. Those relationships open a door to economic partnership and opportunity.

What are your biggest accomplishments to date in this area?

By sheer investment dollars, the announcement of Project Aero will be transformative for our community benefitting generations to come, and from a jobs perspective, the Amazon distribution facility. Those are two of the biggest accomplishments. I think fostering a collaborative conversation amongst the City of Fayetteville, Cumberland County and our private sector stakeholders regarding our economic future is worth mentioning too.

How do you come up with the fun and unique code names for the projects?

They often come with a name already attached, but when we do come up with them, it is something similar to the project that can help us internally remind ourselves of what it involves. An example would be Project Frosting as an industrial baking company. Project Crossfit is one we are moving forward with now and it's a sports dome manufacturer so you can see the tie-in there.

What opportunities do you foresee in the Fayetteville area?

With our advances in emerging technologies, international companies either with a location here within our foreign trade zone or some form of joint venture with an existing company so they can serve the US military supply. I think the development of a mega site here with 800 plus industrial acres is really going to push us forward. Also, bringing I-685 to our community will ensure our connectivity to the Carolina Core. And I think the increased infrastructure that we've been able to recruit from fiber optic providers to Piedmont Natural Gas will set us up well for everything from data centers to advanced manufacturers.

Any exciting future projects on the horizon?

I think seeing Project Aero through the development process is definitely going to be one of the most exciting projects in the works. We are excited to support the Methodist University Cape Fear Valley Health Medical School, which is a major project we are looking to board. And we've had interest from data centers to hyper scalers, which has a lot of potential for our region.