

First Things First

■ TWO YEARS OF COLLEGE ... FOR THE PRICE OF NONE. Lee Early College, a new public high school meeting on the Central Carolina College Campus, is slated to open for the fall semester. When students



graduate from the accelerated program, they will have earned not only a high school diploma, but a two-year college degree as well.

The school is designed for anyone seeking an accelerated academic program — whether it's someone seeking a two-year degree for work in industry or a university-bound student wanting to enter with two years of course credits done. Applications for the Early College freshman class will be accepted in February.

■ TWO COMPANIES OPEN IN LEE COUNTY. Century Stone and Score Group have opened facilities in Lee County. Century Stone, a startup company, is fabricating custom-installed countertops in the Lee County Industrial Park. Score Group, part of an international engineering firm, has opened a sales office in Sanford to market its cell disrupters, a new piece of equipment used in bioscience research and production.

Inside this issue

2 Lee's economy has always trailed the region as a whole, says Charles Hayes. But it may be gaining ground.

3 North Carolina is named second most favorable business climate by a business development firm.

No. 17 ■ FALL 2005

Economic Indicators

An Upbeat Prognosis

"Health of Lee" appears to be on the upswing

With good news emerging from economic reports, education statistics and several quality of life measures, the health of Lee County appears to be good. And improving.

That was the diagnosis when Charles Hayes, CEO of the Regional Triangle Regional Partnership, and Bob Heuts, director of the Lee County Economic Development Corp., provided their annual "Health of Lee County" report in December.

The local unemployment rate currently stands at 5.5 percent, down from 7.3 percent two years ago. Other good news: Average yearly wages are higher, retail sales are up and per capita income is climbing.

What about education? Seventy-five percent of Lee County public schools met their "adequate yearly progress," a government-mandated measure of performance. That was higher than any bordering county. Higher, even, than Wake County and Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools.

On the quality of life ledger, crime was down for the second year in a row.

And that's just a sample.

Eye on Labor

The lingering concern may be Lee's labor market. Manufacturing continues to decline nationally, posing a challenge for a county that's thrived thanks largely to industry.

To compete for jobs, whether they're in manufacturing or other sectors, Heuts said, local workers must develop analytical skills and complete at least two years of commu-



Charles Hayes talks with Doug Wilkinson after the Health of Lee luncheon last month.

nity college.

Hayes drilled the point home, noting that 90 percent of all newly-created jobs require education beyond high school.

Then, local officials must be able to show employers their well-prepared workforce.

"What are companies looking for when they come in?" asked Heuts. "[Labor] is the number one issue, right there.

"If we can't definitely say what kind of people we have here and available — what kind of skills they have — we don't have a chance here in this community."

The entire Health of Lee County report is available at www.lcedc.com/media/.



CHARLES HAYES

Is Lee County gaining ground on neighbors?

One hopeful sign emerging from last month's Health of Lee County report was evidence that Lee County is closing the economic gap on its neighbors.

In some indices, Lee County's economy has lagged behind the Research Triangle Region as a whole. The most obvious measure is the unemployment rate. Lee's rate has usually tracked roughly one percentage point higher, and it still does. In November, the county's rate was 5.5 percent, compared to 4.4 for the region.

But on other economic measures, Lee County is gaining ground. Take per capita income. While the figure throughout the Research Triangle has remained flat over the last several years, Lee County has inched upward — from \$25,155 in 2000 to \$27,669 in 2003. A gap still exists, but it is closing.

It's tempting to dismiss economic statistics as a game, but they're important. Not only do they help measure our true economic vitality, but a community's present numbers can determine its future success.

When companies decide where to locate, they usually settle first on a broad region where they may want to do business. The Research Triangle has attracted plenty of attention throughout the world, so we get a good number of inquiries from expanding business and industry.

But then, they examine areas *within* the region — comparing one area to another — and look at these numbers closely. If the economic outlook appears better in a neighboring county, that's where the company might go. In the "game" of economic statistics, the stakes can be high.

Charles Hayes is president and CEO of the Research Triangle Regional Partnership and a member of the University of North Carolina Board of Governors. He resides in Sanford.

Horner, Bridwell add perspectives to aid economic development effort

Local customers going elsewhere to shop place a huge drain on the economy. It's a well-known fact. Right?

Not according to Bill Horner III, publisher of The Sanford Herald, who outlined results of a recent market survey at the Committee of 100 meeting in September.

With local buying income estimated at just over \$1 billion and total retail sales of roughly \$739 million, there may not be the drain people believe.

"We've got a lot of people coming to Lee County, coming into our [retail trading zone], to buy," Horner said. "We do obviously have people going out of our market, but we have more people probably than we realize coming into our market to spend money."

The publisher also described what media local residents use and what Herald readers wanted in their local newspaper.

Attention shifted to county recreation in November, when community development director Bob Bridwell explained how public parks and greenways help attract investment from industry.

"People buy things on the benefits they perceive, or the benefits they feel are tangible," Bridwell said. "And that's how



Bill Horner III explains how the community uses mass media and lists findings from The Sanford Herald's readership survey.

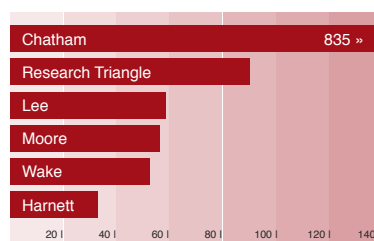
sales are made. That's how communities present themselves: Why would anybody want to come and be attracted to that community?"

Open space, greenways and parks help differentiate one community from another, adding to the quality of life and attracting economic development.

THE REGION AT A GLANCE

Public Space to Roam. Total park acreage, combining state and local recreational sites, per 1,000 residents.
Source: Research Triangle Regional Partnership & the 2003 U.S. Census.

Chatham County.....	835
Research Triangle.....	88
Lee County.....	59
Moore County.....	57
Wake County.....	54
Harnett County.....	33



Economic Indicators

Economic Indicators is a quarterly newsletter of the Lee County Committee of 100, an organization of business men and women committing their time, energy and resources to enhance the economic well-being of Lee County and its citizens.

For information about membership, contact the Lee County Committee of 100 Inc., P.O. Box 4846, Sanford, N.C., 27331-4846. 919-774-8439 (phone). 919-775-5410 (fax). info@lcedc.com (e-mail). News and letters for *Economic Indicators* may be sent to the editor at news@lcedc.com.

Copyright © 2006 by the Lee County Committee of 100. All rights reserved.

January 2006

31 **RTRP Regional Advisory Council.**
10 a.m. RTRP, 1000 Trade Drive, Suite 124, RDU International Airport. Contact Bob Heuts, 919.774.8439 or info@lcedc.com.

February 2006

7 **Downtown Sanford Inc. Board.**
8 a.m. Lee County EDC Office, 226 Carthage Street. Contact David Montgomery, 919.775.8332 or downtown@sanfordnc.net.

9 **Central Carolina Society for Human Resource Management.**
noon. Chef Paul's Café, 610 E. Main Street, Sanford. Contact Jane Haber, 919.774.8439 or info@lcedc.com.

24 **Committee of 100.** Jon Parsons, executive director of Sustainable Sandhills, and U.S. Army Col. Al Aycock will discuss coming population growth expected from recent Base Realignment and Closure decisions and its impact on the region.
noon. Chef Paul's Café, 610 E. Main Street, Sanford. Contact Jane Haber, 919.774.8439 or info@lcedc.com.

March 2006

7 **Downtown Sanford Inc. Board.**
8 a.m. Lee County EDC Office, 226 Carthage Street. Contact David Montgomery, 919.775.8332 or downtown@sanfordnc.net.

9 **Central Carolina Society for Human Resource Management.**
noon. Chef Paul's Café, 610 E. Main Street, Sanford. Contact Jane Haber, 919.774.8439 or info@lcedc.com.

13 **Lee Co. Economic Development Corp.** 8 a.m. Lee County EDC Office, 226 Carthage Street. Contact Jane Haber, 919.774.8439 or info@lcedc.com.

22 **Lee Co. Industrial Managers Association.** 11:45 a.m. Location To Be Announced. Contact Jane Haber, 919.774.8439 or info@lcedc.com.

CCCC Business Seminars

■ **Stress & Sanity in the Workplace.** Jan. 25, 11:30 a.m. to 1:15 p.m., \$6 registration includes lunch.

■ **Grants: From the Basics to Application Detail.** Mar. 3, 6:15 to 8:45 p.m., free.

**FOCUS on Industrial Sites**

With 60,000 square feet of manufacturing space and a 1,500 square foot office, the Gaylord Building offers attractive light manufacturing space on eight acres — with easy access to U.S. 421. For other available sites in Lee County, visit www.lcedc.com, click on "Buildings & Sites," and select either buildings or sites.

Economic Indicators

Lee County Committee of 100 Inc.
P.O. Box 4846
Sanford, NC 27331-4846