



# WYTHE Economic Development News

**JOINT INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
OF WYTHE COUNTY, WYTHEVILLE, AND RURAL RETREAT**

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## Note from the Executive Director

Wythe County and Wytheville Community College hosted the New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Investment Board's Economic/Workforce Development Forum on August 15. Following a keynote address by Gary McLaren, Deputy Director of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, program speakers

presented success stories and best practices that involved collaboration of economic development and workforce development practitioners.

Other exciting news includes the implementation of Wythe County's new career coaching program with career coaches assigned to the three middle/high school pairs. The Joint IDA and Wythe Manufacturing Council were instrumental in obtaining a VEC grant to help initiate the program. Also expected to have major long-term influence on Wythe County's workforce and quality of life was the announcement that the Wythe-Bland Community Foundation will provide tuition scholarships to all qualifying Wythe and Bland high school graduates beginning next year. Such focus on workforce development bodes well for Wythe County's continued economic development success.

*Alan Hawthorne*

## Workforce Development Initiatives

Workforce preparedness is identified as one of the essential components of economic development, and local plant managers have made it clear that this is a key issue for them. The Wythe Manufacturing Council, an informal association of larger manufacturers in Wythe County, commissioned a white paper last year on local manufacturing workforce development. In response to recommendations in the paper, the Wythe County Board of Supervisors formed an ad hoc committee consisting of representatives of Wythe County Public Schools, Wytheville Community College, the Board of Supervisors, local industry, and the Joint IDA. The committee recommended two specific actions to better position Wythe County's workforce to meet tomorrow's economic realities.

The first initiative was to implement a career coaching program with a career coach assigned to each of the three middle school/high school pairs in the county. Career coaches work with students to make them aware of career options, to help them identify career goals, and to help them identify needed skill sets and required training to achieve those goals.

The second initiative is the creation of a manufacturing technology program at the Wythe County Technology Center. This program will provide students a general well-rounded introduction to the modern industrial world and prepare students for pursuing higher education or for direct entry in the manufacturing sector. These exciting new programs will help keep Wythe County's workforce competitive in the world economy.

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*[www.WytheIDA.org](http://www.WytheIDA.org)*

## Economic/Workforce Development Forum

Held at Wytheville Community College on August 15, the New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Investment Board's Economic/Workforce Development Forum drew about fifty participants from the region and statewide. Speakers covered such topics as Wythe County's workforce initiatives (see next article), Smyth and Washington counties' Dream It! Do It! program, and research analysis tools. Government, education, and business leaders are working aggressively and cooperatively to make workforce development a priority for securing the area's future. The region is fortunate that the Workforce Investment Board and the state are committed partners in this endeavor.

## Virginia Facts

- Virginia has the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest worker's compensation costs in the nation.
- Virginia is the northernmost right-to-work state in the Southeast.
- A 2006 study by Pollina Corporate Real Estate found Virginia to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> most business-friendly state.
- Virginia's top export is industrial machinery.
- Forbes.com ranked Virginia as the best state to do business.

## Wythe County Facts

- Four million people reside within a 100-mile radius of Wythe County.
- Wythe County's taxable sales growth exceeded the state's taxable sales growth by 7.5% over the past ten years.
- Wytheville was the 14<sup>th</sup> most experienced location by travelers in Virginia.

## Progress Park Update

Anyone who has driven by Progress Park lately has noticed the tremendous development activity. The Gatorade facility is nearly complete, and the Amcor PET Packaging facility is under construction. Gator Lane is being extended to connect the northern access road with the southern access road. The rail line has been installed. Appalachian Power is constructing a new substation to serve Progress Park. Lane Enterprises and Coalfield Services will soon construct their new facilities.



View of the Gatorade/Amcor sites as Amcor begins construction.

## Acrylife and VT Collaborate for Cutting-Edge Product Design

Acrylife, Inc., a Wytheville-based company operating in the Fairview Industrial Park, is an entrepreneurial leader in the roofing business. The company and a team of professors and students at Virginia Tech developed a new vent technology for membrane roofing systems. The new technology eliminates the uplift pressure on membrane roofs experienced during high winds, thereby allowing the roof to withstand hurricane-level winds. Tests at the NASA Full Scale Wind Tunnel demonstrated Acrylife's design effectively holds the membrane in place at wind speeds approaching 80 mph. The membrane Acrylife uses is produced by Haogenplast Israel. A prototype of the roof is already used on the Knowledge Works II building in the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center. Congratulations to Chuck and Pat Johnson and their team at Acrylife.

## Wythe Manufacturing Council News

The Wythe Manufacturing Council held its quarterly meeting at the new Gatorade facility in Progress Park. Following a delicious lunch catered by Smokey's Barbeque, the business program introduced the new career coaches and previewed the new manufacturing technology program planned to begin with the 2007–2008 academic year at the Wythe County Technology Center. The record crowd was briefed by Gatorade manager Arnie Wodtke and toured the new manufacturing facility, which is scheduled to begin production in September. Rodney Coleman, PBG, and Ken Morrow, Brewer Automotive Components, have agreed to serve on the council's steering committee.

## Regional Unemployment Rates

Location	April-05	April-06	May-05	May-06	June-05	June-06
Wythe	3.6%	4.3%	3.7%	3.6%	3.9%	4.0%
Bland	3.7%	4.0%	4.1%	3.7%	4.5%	4.1%
Smyth	4.1%	4.1%	4.3%	3.9%	4.5%	4.4%
Carroll	5.1%	4.9%	5.3%	4.5%	5.6%	5.5%
Grayson	4.3%	5.3%	4.6%	5.1%	4.9%	6.3%
Pulaski	4.1%	3.9%	4.4%	3.5%	4.5%	3.9%
Galax	4.9%	6.7%	4.6%	5.9%	4.9%	7.1%
Virginia	3.4%	3.1%	3.5%	2.9%	3.7%	3.3%
US	4.9%	4.5%	4.9%	4.4%	5.2%	4.8%

## Presentations Available

If your civic or other community group would like to have a presentation on Progress Park or on Wythe County economic development in general, please contact the Joint IDA office to schedule a presentation for your organization.

**Wythe Economic Development News** is published quarterly by the Joint Industrial Development Authority of Wythe County to inform interested parties of industrial development activities in the county and its incorporated towns. If you are not on the distribution list and would like to be added, please let us know at [JointIDA@wytheville.org](mailto:JointIDA@wytheville.org) or call 276-223-3370.