

# Berkeley County anticipates major growth

BY LIZ SEGRIST

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The phrase "I love beach music" is painted on a wall inside Music Man's Bar-B-Que in downtown Moncks Corner. About 15 people stood in line during lunchtime on a weekday to get their fill of barbecue, ribs and macaroni and cheese.

A full band setup is at the ready for owner Gene Cribb's weekly concerts. He said 2016 was the best year yet for his 11-year-old restaurant.

Cribb said he hopes the growth happening throughout Berkeley County will bring more qualified applicants and new customers to the area. He wants to see an influx of retail shops and restaurants open nearby to "create more of a buzz in the downtown area."

"I'm excited about the companies coming in. ... The growth is good for businesses," he said.

Barry Jurs, economic development director for Berkeley County, and Bill Peagler, the county supervisor, describe the Berkeley County of their youth as mostly rural, the kind of place where everybody knew everybody.

Now the duo, who said they have been close friends for years, work to recruit new companies' operations or existing companies' expansions, which inevitably bring more people and development to the county.

Since May 2015, 10 companies have announced plans to invest more than \$999 million and create 3,600 jobs in Berkeley County, assuming all projects come to fruition, according to data from the S.C. Commerce Department.

"Times have definitely changed," Jurs said.

Along with the companies moving in, some have shuttered or decreased operations. DuPont recently said it plans to close its Kevlar plant this summer and relocate those operations to Richmond, Va. DuPont said 113 employees will be laid off from the Goose Creek facility.

Century Aluminum also halved its operations in 2015, closing one of two lines and laying off 300 of its 600 employees at the Mt. Holly aluminum smelter in Goose Creek. Century says the issue stems from power costs through Santee Cooper; the utility says declining aluminum prices are the cause. The companies are currently in a legal dispute.

## 'A pivotal moment'

A shift from the mostly rural lifestyle in Berkeley County began in the 1970s and 1980s. Industrial companies started moving into sites along the Cooper River, Interstate 26 was extended into the Lowcountry and "the bedroom community of Charleston started reaching further out



Above: Barry Jurs, Berkeley County's economic development director, said he sees much of the future development happening near Interstate 26. Right: Gene Cribb, owner of Music Man's Bar-B-Que in downtown Moncks Corner, said the county's growth is good for business. (Photos/Liz Segrist)



187 to 199 — are either being redone or being enhanced to handle incoming development and growth.

A cluster of shovel-ready sites sits nearby, and tens of thousands of homes are permitted for the Cainhoy, Carnes Crossroads and Nexton developments.

Jurs said he sees this part of the county along I-26 becoming a huge hub of industrial and logistics companies, housing communities and commercial projects to support the area's residents and workers, as well as overflow from Charleston's expanding population.

"We're going to see a lot of growth here. We'll see it in Moncks Corner as well, but this is where most of the growth will be," Jurs said, adding that the Cooper River corridor will remain mostly industrial and the northern part of the county will maintain its rural roots.

Jay Law, the broker and owner of The Real Estate Firm in downtown Moncks Corner, said he has seen changes coming to the county over the past few years.

He launched his business on Main Street last year with six agents. He has since hired 10 more to keep pace with the flow of real estate deals in the area.

He said it's too early to feel the true effect of the Volvo plant, but he has seen land value increasing near the site and more people moving into the area.

Law, also a town councilman, said the town is working to attract more restaurants and shops to the downtown area while maintaining its character.

"One of the charming elements of Moncks Corner still is even though it's growing very rapidly, it still has a very small-town feel," Law said. "I think a lot of towns have lost that, but you really still have that feel in Moncks Corner."

Jurs predicted that the county's available land and logistics network will continue to attract manufacturers to the area.

"These types of jobs change people's lives. They actually change generations because it's not just 'go work hard and come home and at the end of the week there's no money left,'" Jurs said. "These jobs provide discretionary income for families to do things, improve their quality of life and give their children a better opportunity." ■

## Announcements in Berkeley County in the past two years:

| Announced date | Company  | Announced investment | Announced jobs |
|----------------|--|----------------------|----------------|
| December 2016  | Evonik Industries                                  | \$120,000,000        | 50             |
| November 2016  | Thorne Research Inc.                               | \$35,000,000         | 330            |
| November 2016  | Audio-Technica U.S. Inc.                           | \$3,300,000          | 6              |
| September 2016 | Stoba  | \$7,700,000          | 61             |
| May 2016       | Blackbaud (expansion)                              | \$154,000,000        | 300            |
| May 2016       | Viva TPE Products LLC                              | \$28,000,000         | 200            |
| October 2015   | A&R Bulk-Pak SC LLC                                | \$7,500,000          | 25             |
| August 2015    | Impresa Aerospace LLC (formerly Dynamic Solutions) | Not disclosed        | 72             |
| August 2015    | Gerber Childrenswear Inc.                          | \$33,000,000         | 45             |
| May 2015       | Volvo Cars   | \$600,000,000        | 2,000          |

Source: S.C. Commerce Department

into Moncks Corner," Jurs said.

When the Navy base in North Charleston closed in 1996, thousands of Lowcountry residents were without jobs.

"That was a pivotal moment when we had to decide what the future of Berkeley County would be," Jurs said. "We became very focused on bringing in large businesses, understanding that larger businesses offer opportunities for lots of jobs with good pay. They also offer a strong tax base."

The county worked to maintain its rural character and long-standing jobs — which include small businesses, farming, timber management and industrial work — while also pursuing large economic development wins.

Jurs said the housing and industrial markets were steady from the mid-'90s until 2008, when the recession hit.

"It was very, very slow," he said. "Then in 2015, the pendulum swung back to the other side. Investors became more willing to move capital. ... My first day in the office the phone was quiet. It started ringing on the second day and has not

stopped. It was that acute."

Jurs said Berkeley County received a call from S.C. Commerce officials in early 2015, requesting assistance with a secret project. Over the next few months, Peagler and Jurs worked with numerous state and local agencies to help secure the Volvo deal.

In May 2015, Volvo officials said Berkeley County would be home to the company's first U.S. operation. The project will impact the community for decades to come once it launches operations in 2018.

It is the county's largest economic development deal ever, and the project marks the third automotive manufacturer to establish operations in South Carolina, along with BMW Manufacturing Co. in Greer and Mercedes-Benz Vans in North Charleston.

## 'Huge amount of growth'

Jurs said he envisions much of the county's future development occurring along Interstate 26. Five interchanges in a 12-mile stretch — spanning from exits

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