

2023

Community Impact Report



CABARRUS COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA

**A great location. A strong workforce.
A culture of hard work and innovation.**

Community Impact

Sue Monk Kidd, author of *The Secret Life of Bees*, remarked, “Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can’t remember who we are or why we’re here.”

At the Cabarrus EDC, we are steadfast in who we are and why we’re here.

The Cabarrus EDC makes a measurable impact on individuals and families through strategic partnerships that support local startups, existing businesses, and recruitment of new industry.

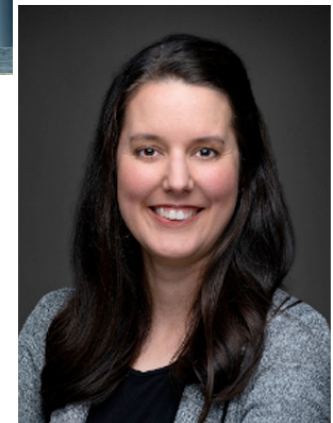
Despite our existential certainty, we agree with Ms. Kidd on the key role that storytelling plays in reinforcing that identity. In this community impact report, we go beyond the numbers that you find in our annual report to tell the stories of individuals, families and businesses that we have impacted, and that have impacted us.

This year, you’ll hear from two individuals whose work has shaped this community. Craig Lamb, the recently retired VP of Corporate and Community Education at Rowan-Cabarrus Community college shares his perspective on these pages and in an extended on-line interview. Our own Samantha Grass translates what we have seen in industrial recruitment to where we see recruitment going.

We are also working to strengthen the workforce and small business climates and offer a glimpse into the work of several of our community partners. We share lessons learned from the EDC’s inter-city visit to San Antonio. And, of course, we spotlight successful businesses from A to Z (literally: Artisan Ice Sculptures, Ketchie, and Zipline).

This report shows who we are and why we are here. Our hope is that you’ll join us in becoming who we will be and finding your reason for being here in the years to come.

Page Castrodale



Page Castrodale

Cabarrus EDC

Executive Director



Are you interested in having Page make a presentation about Economic Development for your group or organization?
Send her an email: pcastrsdale@cabarrusedc.com

Exploring Economic Development Strategies

Cabarrus EDC staff, board members, investors, and partners traveled to San Antonio to meet with economic development leaders and gained valuable insights on successful strategies that could be implemented here in Cabarrus County.

Why San Antonio?

Along with North Carolina, Texas is recognized as one of CNBC's and Area Development's top states for business. The San Antonio region often competes with the Charlotte Region for corporate relocations, and is home to both commercial redevelopment projects and business incubators that support existing business and entrepreneurship.



Five Things We Learned

Capitalizing on Industry Clusters

With a Toyota plant in San Antonio and Tesla plant in Austin, New Braunfels, TX is at the center of an automotive corridor. We repeatedly heard about how the community leverages the significant military presence in their region.

Lesson: Capitalize on what you have.

History Preservation and Redevelopment

The site of the old Pearl Brewery, once the largest brewery in Texas had fallen into blight. Today, it is a thriving cultural center with shops and restaurants that was activated by bringing in crowds for special events. There are connections to the site's history throughout.

Lesson: Preserve history and use special events to draw crowds to revitalized area to give space momentum.

Workforce Development Investment

Voters in San Antonio approved a, temporary, 0.125 cent sales tax to fund a workforce development project that identifies industry needs, pays tuition costs to upskill workers, and provides wrap-around services to help workers integrate into their new professions.

Lesson: Collaborate across organizations and commit to educating and training your workforce.

Research Commercialization

The University of Texas San Antonio has a dedicated office to connect businesses with researchers, both to help businesses find the talent they need in research and development, and to provide academics with the skills they need to take an idea to market.

Lesson: Find the commercialization offices within your region's universities and make sure they are aware of the opportunities in your community.

Incubator Spaces

Touring VelocityTX, an incubator redeveloping an historically depressed area of eastern San Antonio, we saw that not every start-up needs the same thing. While one start-up just needs office and collaboration space, another needs a high-tech clean room. VelocityTX provided the infrastructure and the flexibility for each emerging business to build out what it needed.

Lesson: Turnkey spec space may not be necessary to foster new businesses, but flexible space is a key element of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

While each lesson had its unique angle, we saw a common thread through each presentation:
Regional Collaboration.

EDC Partnerships



Historically Underutilized Businesses (HUB)

The City of Concord's DEI Strategist hosted 2 Historically Underutilized Business Workshops in 2023. The two events, held in February 2023 and September 2023, had 76 business attendees.

These events were established to show the City's commitment to supporting local, traditionally disadvantaged businesses and to increase our supplier diversity. Attendees received a step-by-step guide to the HUB Certification process, learned how to secure business with state and local government departments, and were provided an opportunity to network with other local business owners.

Small Business Center

The Small Business Center (SBC) at Rowan-Cabarrus is the heart of small business resources in Cabarrus and Rowan counties, supporting entrepreneurs from first ideas to launching and beyond. Each year, the SBC offers confidential business counseling to approximately 100 clients and hosts in-person workshops and online webinars for over 350 attendees.

Retail Lab, a partnership between the SBC and Flywheel Foundation, received another year of grant funds from Wells Fargo. Former program graduate, Chrissy Santos, successfully re-branded her business, The Palmetto Market, in 2022 as a result of the program. In 2023, she returned to Retail Lab as an instructor to share her experience with future cohorts. Not only is Chrissy giving back to the Retail Lab program, but she's also sharing her e-commerce and marketing expertise for other SBC workshops as well. The SBC sees this as the pinnacle of success when engaged program participants give back through fostering continued small business community growth.



C4 Day - The Cabarrus Chamber



On March 14, 2023, the Cabarrus Chamber hosted Cabarrus County Career Connections Day (C4 Day). This event is a community-wide career fair for job seekers of all ages with access to over 60 employers in Cabarrus County. In addition to attendees learning about available job opportunities, they were also able to engage with Rowan-Cabarrus Community College and Cabarrus College of Health Sciences to discover the many industry-recognized certifications and degree programs they offer.

C4 Day is led by the Cabarrus Chamber and supported by the Cabarrus Economic Development Corporation, Cabarrus County Education Foundation, Kannapolis Education Foundation, NCWorks Career Center, Cabarrus County Schools, and Kannapolis City Schools.



On October 5 and 6, 2023, Flywheel Foundation hosted ConvergeSouth at the Cabarrus Center. The two-day Expo and Conference featured founders, entrepreneurs, and investors from across the Southeast. Now in its ninth consecutive year, this marked the first time the conference was held at the Cabarrus Center instead of Flywheel's flagship location in Winston Salem.

"Converge South exposed local entrepreneurs to resources and knowledge they can use to scale their business and will show to entrepreneurs from out of town what a tremendous entrepreneurial ecosystem we are building in Cabarrus," adds Page Castrodale, Executive Director of the Cabarrus Economic Development Corporation.



The conference was a collaborative effort by regional Entrepreneurship Service Organizations, with Innovate Charlotte, RevTech Labs, Boost Pad, SBTDC, and Tech CXO serving on the organizing committee along with the local Chamber, Economic Development Corporation, and Small Business Center.

The over 75 early and growth-stage startup companies that exhibited were screened by the organizing committee and selected based on their investment thesis and ability to scale to large enterprises.

The conference served as an ideal opportunity for startup founders and leaders of small businesses in the region to network, meet investors, and stay on top of emerging trends and technologies.

Health Equity Innovation Challenge (HEIC)

In 2023, HEIC entered its inaugural year. The Challenge is a business idea competition, administered by Flywheel Foundation and title sponsored by Atrium Health – Greater Charlotte North Area. The Challenge seeks solutions to problems causing disparities in healthcare outcomes experienced by communities of color and those at 200% poverty level in the region including Cabarrus, Rowan, Iredell, Stanly, and North Mecklenburg Counties. It requires engagement with the target populations in these counties for proof-of-concept testing.



The Challenge received over 100 applications in its first year. The winners were among eleven finalist companies invited to pitch on April 29 at the Cabarrus Center to the Advisory Board overseeing the program. The five 2023 winners are: CareYaya Health Technologies (Durham), CliniSpan Health (Triad), F.E.L.K After School Care (Salisbury), Nutrible (St. Louis, MO), ZABS Place (Charlotte).

Each company received a total of \$20,000 in grant funding, twelve weeks of curated acceleration, and two years of incubation in the Venture Mentoring Services program at the Cabarrus Center. In addition, the companies will be introduced to strategic partnerships and additional investment capital.

"Cultivating a community of startup founders and new businesses is a key part of our economic development strategy for the region," said Cabarrus EDC Executive Director Page Castrodale. "The Health Equity portfolio of companies adds to the momentum of new business starts and small business growth supported by the Cabarrus Center."

Existing Business News

Artisan Ice Sculptures

As part of the EDC's annual summit in August, we gave local manufacturers the opportunity to showcase their product by providing the center pieces for our event. Concord's Artisan Ice Sculptures won this year's event.

Artisan Ice Sculptures creates custom designed cocktail ice displays, which they cut in-house in a 1,100 SF freezer. After designing each piece, they rough cut blocks of ice with chainsaws before finishing their sculpture with custom made power tools. They provide their art to over 60 bars and restaurants throughout the Carolinas and Georgia.



Ketchie

On October 6, 2023, Cabarrus EDC celebrated Manufacturing Day. This annual celebration aims to inspire the future workforce and raise awareness about the various jobs that are available in the industry. There are millions of modern manufacturing jobs coming online in the next decade, meaning there are so many opportunities for our future workforce to develop the skills they need to be successful in this growing industry.

In Cabarrus County, the EDC hosted a panel discussion at Ketchie, with an emphasis on their Opportunity Knocks internship program for high school students.

Opportunity Knocks enables students to shadow experienced machinists in factory environments while earning school credit. The interns go through a 16-week course that helps them explore the role of character in a professional trades environment and includes leadership and manufacturing-focused exercises. Students spend four days a week on-site at Ketchie with 3 days job shadowing machinists on the shop floor, and one day in a classroom setting at the shop discussing character traits and soft skills.



**MFG
DAY**

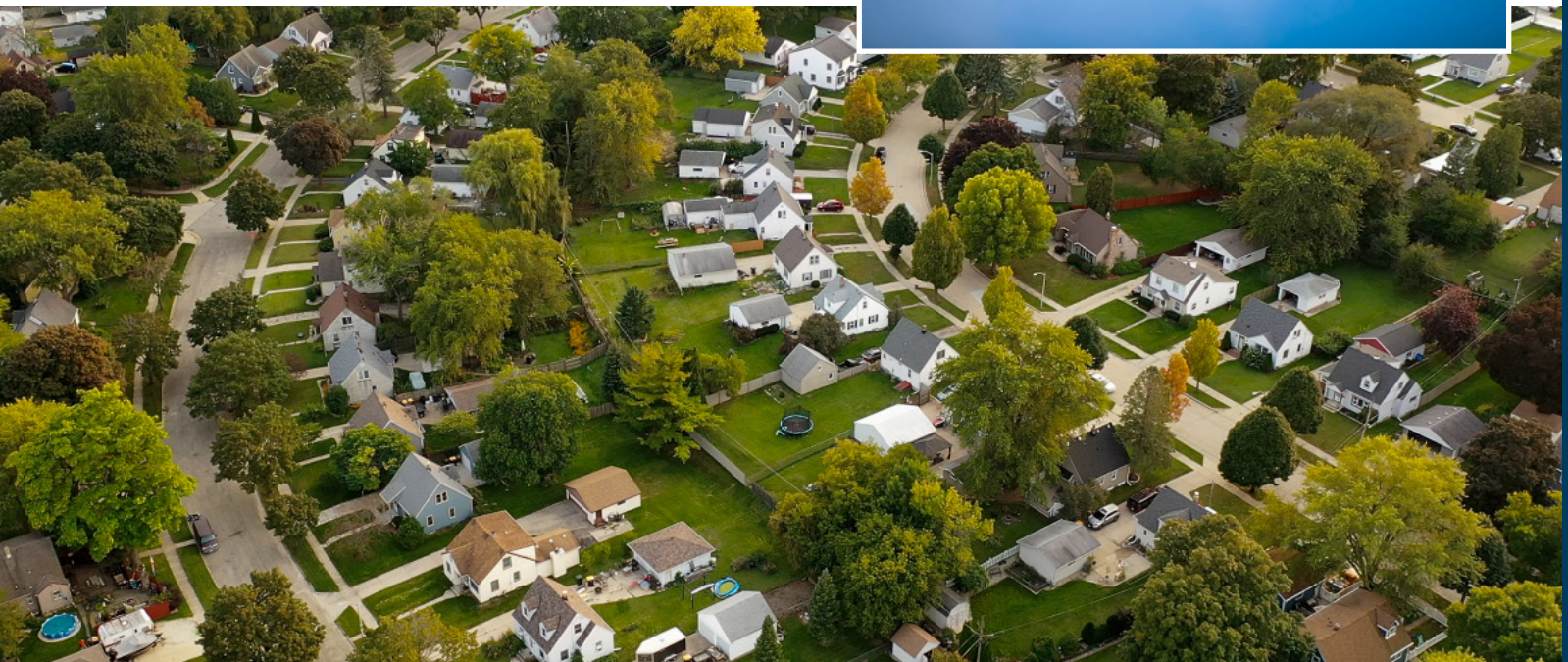
“They absolutely love these high schoolers,” said Ketchie President and Owner, Courtney Silver about the two mentors at Ketchie, who each have more than 30 years’ experience. “It gives them an opportunity to share their entire work career: what they’re doing, experiences learned along the way. It’s been neat to see.”



Zipline Update

In last year's annual report we featured Zipline, an autonomous drone company on a mission to build the world's first logistics system that serves all people equally, whose flight operations are now headquartered in Concord.

Thanks to a landmark decision from the FAA last fall, Zipline is now able to make commercial deliveries beyond visual line of sight without visual observers. The company has already been operating their flights using this technology all over the world carrying deliveries of pharmaceuticals, blood, vaccines, educational materials, food, and convenience items to tens of millions of people. This decision allows Zipline to scale from thousands of U.S. deliveries each day to hundreds of thousands and will improve the lives of millions of Americans. We are proud to have Zipline in Cabarrus County as we watch them work tirelessly to achieve their incredible mission.



Stephanie Burleson

Cabarrus EDC

Business Support Manager



We would love to hear from you...



Do you have a story about your Cabarrus County business that you'd like to share?

Send Stephanie an email: sburleson@cabarrusedc.com

Sam's Perspective

Samantha (Sam) Grass joined the Cabarrus EDC in 2007 and has served as Recruitment Project Manager since 2014. We sat down with Samantha to get her perspective on the current environment for industrial development and the evolution of the organization.

Sam, what is the biggest change that you've seen in economic development over the last 15 years?

Probably the biggest change I've seen over the years are projects' aggressive timelines and their need for speed to market. By the time we receive a request for information (RFI), the region or our community has already been pre-qualified. They know us already – they know our labor shed and that they could be successful here. When we have the opportunity to meet with company leadership during a client visit, the conversation is more about real estate options and can we meet their timelines regarding permitting and having the infrastructure/utilities in place.



Samantha Grass
Cabarrus EDC
Recruitment Project Manager



In the past several years, we've hit some home runs with billion dollar project announcements. What did you learn from those projects? How were those projects similar to or different from the typical project that you see?

One of my biggest takeaways is the importance of ready product. And how quickly community partners can come together and form solutions to meet the needs of these mega projects.

Companies have aggressive timelines and want sites ready for development – ones without development risks. They need sites that can accommodate their utility requirements and other needs and meet operational and production timelines. When we have client visits, we will often include our utility and resource partners to be a part of those initial discussions. Our subject matter experts are there to ensure we can accommodate their needs and will be with them every step of the way if they decide to move forward with their project in Cabarrus. Companies will often comment about how great their experience was working with our community leaders and partners and how our folks were able to keep the projects on track and meet deadlines.

What is the latest trend in the RFPs that you are seeing? What are our greatest challenges in responding to current opportunities?

We are receiving many EV and battery related requests these days. The majority of these requests have a need for very large greenfield sites and their electric requirements are substantial as well. Before submitting real estate options for any recruitment projects, we are reviewing each request to determine if it is a good fit for the community and that we can support their utility requirements and meet their operational timelines. We would likely not be able to submit real estate options for projects with very large water and sewer requirements unless their demands were phased over time.

Request for Information (RFI) Roadmap



The EDC stays involved with the company through each of these steps and long after they've reached the end of this particular journey. A company can change course at any point in this process.

**EDC Receives
a Request for
Information**

- ✓ Do we have the real estate?
- ✓ Do we have the required infrastructure (rail, electricity, water/wastewater, etc.)?
- ✓ Will the project (the company) create jobs with wages above our current county average wage?

**Due Diligence
(EDC Waits)**

**Elected Officials
Consider Incentive
Support**

**Company
Decision
Announced**

**EDC Submits
a Response**

**Project Makes
a Shortlist**

**Final Negotiations
(Wrapping up
the Details)**

**Company Moves
Forward with the Project**

Scan QR
code to view
full PDF of the
RFI Roadmap





Workforce Development Ecosystem

On December 31, 2023, **Craig Lamb**, VP of Corporate and Continuing Education, retired from Rowan-Cabarrus Community College after a career of nearly 30 years of developing workforce, including the last 10 at Rowan-Cabarrus where Craig has been a critical part of the EDC team. We sat down with Craig to get his perspective on the workforce development ecosystem.

We often hear economic development consultants say that North Carolina's big strength is our community college system. What makes us so strong?

There are several factors, but mainly it's the funding model. The community college system here wasn't just set up to help people get degrees, but to help the workforce be resilient and capable and prepared. That means that if people want to change their careers, they can do it inexpensively. Another factor is the high degree of alignment that exists between the community college system, the university system and the K-12 system. There are pathways for people to get where they need to be.



RCCC President, Carol Spalding presents a retirement plaque to Craig Lamb



At Rowan-Cabarrus (RCCC), we have the Advanced Technology Center. How does this program impact economic development?

I think the Advanced Technology Center (ATC) is a statement that we are writing new narratives for our community and talking about what the future looks like.

The problem was, "Where will the next generation of manufacturing workers come from?" And, the interested parties were the manufacturers, our chambers of commerce, our economic development groups and our workforce development board and the community college. Those groups got together and devised a way to create a sustainable and affordable solution.

The ATC is a community asset for helping people obtain skills, helping businesses become competitive, and helping our community attract and retain high wage, high skill and high security jobs.

You have a highly engaged and action-oriented business services team that serves existing businesses. Why is it important for businesses to have a liaison with the college?

The college is a big place. It's difficult for a company to know how to get started. The business services team serves as the front door for our business partners to be able to access resources, tools and students inside the college.



If they want a grant, if they need specialized training for a particular employee or a group of employees or want to learn about best practices, having a person that they can talk to on a regular basis is important. The team is also expert at helping businesses identify people solutions for their business.

The business services team's motto is that they want to be our employers' trusted partner. They help to build those partnerships over time and stay engaged with them deliberately along the way.

If someone in the community wants to change their career, how quickly can they get the training that they need and how accessible is it to them?

If you look at your watch every time the big hand gets to 12, we're starting a class somewhere. Six days a week, 52 weeks a year, 14 hours a day.

So, if the door is opening every hour and the classes themselves are usually nine weeks or less, it is pretty low risk to get started with education. And they will leave with a certification.

That will jumpstart their ability to get into a new career or a higher level job. Helping individuals is just as important as helping the businesses. It's a circle. You can't help one without helping the other.



Craig receives a congratulatory video message from his son, Josiah

We've started lot of second chance programs. We got a grant to start a program to teach people about construction trades who have been justice involved.

We have a partnership with the Cabarrus County Sheriff to teach them skills and then we've had employers come in and interview people in the jail so they can have a job the day they come out.

Many of them have found that they can succeed at training and pursue more education. Some of them will immediately go to work and some will sign up for other programs that they can climb even higher.

To connect with the business services team, visit rccc.edu/corporatecontinuing.

To read more of our interview with Craig, including how Rowan-Cabarrus created a new program to support Eli Lilly's bio-science needs, the role of collaboration in the workforce system and the accomplishment he is most proud of, click on the QR code.





A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR INVESTORS



Cabarrus Economic Development Corporation (Cabarrus EDC) is a public-private partnership that serves as the lead economic development agency for Cabarrus County and its five municipalities.

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