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CHARLOTTE BUSINESS JOURNAL



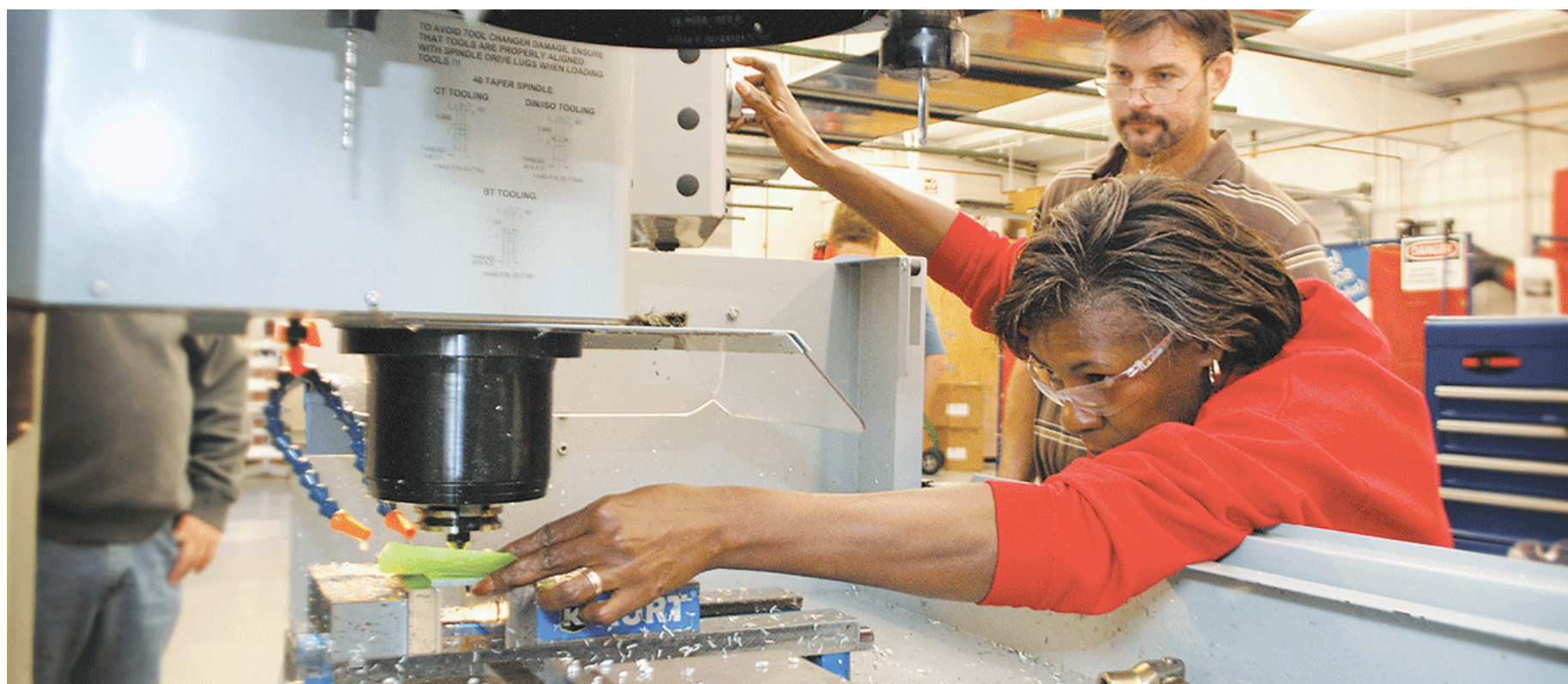
# MONROE UNION COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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Provided by: South Piedmont Community College

# Powered by Workforce:

## Talent and Training Keeps Union County Economy Thriving

By: Lawrence Bivins

**L**abor skills and talent pipelines now rank as top site-selection factors according to surveys of national location advisors. That's good news for Union County, which has stayed ahead of the curve.

Educational leaders, economic developers, and business representatives have a history of working smart and working together to align the county's workforce with the needs of arriving and expanding employers. Ron Mahle, Existing Industry Manager at Monroe-Union County Economic Development Commission (MUCEDC), states that strategic collaboration for workforce readiness comes from the Union County JobReady Partnership, a 501(c)(3) that unites stakeholders under one umbrella. "It provides a vision for a well-prepared workforce by being the main advisory board for the Career & Technical Education (CTE) efforts at Union County Public Schools (UCPS)," says Mahle,

who chairs the Partnership. South Piedmont Community College (SPCC) and Wingate University are also key players, along with industry representatives and school system officials.

The county's industrial diversity – long viewed as a source of economic stability for the local economy – requires flexible, customizable solutions for readying local talent. Along with its approximately 200 manufacturers, the county has robust healthcare, utilities, agribusiness, and professional services sectors, each needing distinct skill sets. "We have such a diverse sector makeup that we must curate an inclusive strategy," says Mahle, who has served in his current

position for 18 years. County leaders have thus developed an impressive roster of CTE academies. High schools, for instance, offer curricula customized around careers in agricultural and food systems technology, engineering, aerospace and aeronautics, and healthcare.

Brian Davis, a career K-12 educator with UCPS, has run the county's busy CTE program for the last four years. He describes his team's "great partnership" with MUCEDC. "We sit down together and talk about the whole pipeline," Davis says. "They're our greatest advocate."

Career development coordinators are assigned to each of the county's public high schools, working closely with school counselors and career coaches from SPCC to expose students – along with parents and teachers – to lucrative local careers and

the coursework necessary to pursue them. The system has also assigned three career development coordinators to float among the county's nine middle schools. "It's making a huge impact," Davis says. Outreach includes reliance on industry partners, who are available to meet with parents and students to discuss company needs and employment practices.

**“We have such a diverse sector makeup that we must curate an inclusive strategy.”**

**RON MAHLE**

Monroe-Union County Economic Development Commission



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Union County's CTE program is far from the antiquated images of vo-tech classes shunting those who were not "college material" into blue-collar work. "The culture has changed," says Allen Plyler, curriculum and instructional management coordinator for UCPS. Plyler works closely with Davis, Mahle, and other partners in executing the County's workforce readiness strategy. "CTE now has engineering," says Plyler, a former math teacher. CTE programs welcome college-going kids – even AP students. "We want honor students, too," he says. Job shadowing opportunities offer students a glimpse into what various career choices involve. "By offering them an opportunity to get their feet wet, they may find out what they do want to do," says Plyler. A host of summer academic camps have become so popular that there is a waiting list for interested students.

After successfully integrating workforce development resources with high school curricular and counseling programs, Plyler and Davis are taking their career path messaging into middle schools and, increasingly, even elementary schools. "We're starting earlier," Davis says, emphasizing the importance of teaching soft skills early on.

Among those who welcome a more significant role for K-12 schools in the workforce readiness process are leaders of SPCC. "Everybody's willing to come to the table and do what needs to be done to serve business and industry," says Chris Rivera, Vice President of Business Solutions at SPCC. "We want the student transition into the community college not to feel so foreign," he explains. The college has provided new and existing industries with free customized workforce

training. In addition, corporate training from SPCC is affordable for companies looking to sharpen talent resources. The college even maintains an articulation with Wingate University that eases the path for South Piedmont grads to pursue affordable four-year degrees without leaving the county. "It's great to see the partnerships here," says Rivera, who has served in workforce development positions at campuses in North Carolina and Florida.

Work-based learning is an increasingly popular option for companies and students in Union County.

South Piedmont administers apprenticeships on behalf of participating employers – programs that provide students with debt-free associate degrees, paid work experience, and a job offer upon graduation. Apprenticeships are available across manufacturing careers and non-industrial fields like healthcare. "Pre-apprenticeships" – work-based learning programs that can run from a few weeks to a few months – also support career paths in technical fields. Pre-apprenticeship students take morning classes at their high school before dividing the afternoon

between SPCC classes and work at companies like Greiner Bio-One, an Austrian medical device maker that is among numerous local industry partners.

Union County employers have shown remarkable generosity in supporting these programs through their leadership, technical input, and financial contributions for New Century Scholarships, another program developed by the JobReady Partnership. "These scholarships target SPCC students pursuing any curriculum," Ron Mahle says. Corporate donations also fund scholarships for Union County Robotics Challenge winners, a twice-yearly event started in 2015. For example, a recent \$25,000 contribution from Collins Aerospace will fund three scholarships for graduating students heading to community college or university. "Collins approached me to help facilitate this opportunity," Mahle recalls. "JobReady makes these partnerships possible." 🚀

**“Everybody’s willing to come to the table and do what needs to be done to serve business and industry.”**

**ALLEN PLYLER**

Union County Public Schools



Provided by: Collins Aerospace



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# Platé Takes Leadership

## into Statewide Economic Development Role

By: Lawrence Bivins

**F**or 24 years, Chris Platé has helped usher Monroe and Union County into the 21st-century economy. In the past year, he has exercised his skills and experience in leading North Carolina's community of economic development practitioners, allies, and partners. Last July, the 900+ North Carolina Economic Development Association (NCEDA) members elected Platé to a one-year term as President.

Founded in 1966, the association has long excelled at providing a networking platform for economic developers to meet and compare notes. More recently, NCEDA has set the vision for becoming "the voice for economic development in North Carolina," especially regarding policy and advocacy. "We've made much better inroads into the legislature," Platé says. "They're now utilizing our knowledge when developing new legislation."

Platé joined NCEDA as a member shortly after arriving in Union County in the late 1990s. In 2016, the association named him Economic Developer of the Year, citing his success in building Monroe's aerospace and aviation cluster. He joined NCEDA's board in 2017 and took on the Chairmanship of its Legislative Committee. Platé also previously served as NCEDA's Secretary-Treasurer and Vice President.



Provided by: North Carolina Economic Development Association

**"We've made much better inroads into the legislature... They're now utilizing our knowledge when developing new legislation."**

**CHRIS PLATÉ**

North Carolina Economic Development Association

NCEDA has more than doubled its membership in the last six years. In response, the organization is fine-tuning its programs and strategies, including a drive to bring more diversity into the state's economic development ranks. Platé's term as president has included establishing a Committee on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, which he chairs. Among other initiatives, the committee has been developing strategies on how to best reach into the state's Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) and Native American tribes to promote economic

development career paths and greater engagement in the state's job creation strategies.

"I've also tried to bring a little fun back to the association," Platé says. Recent conferences have pulled back from the ultra-competitive image of hard-charging corporate recruiters to instill a lighter touch. A golf cart was the icon for the association's spring conference in Pinehurst this year, providing the visual for its "Driving to Development" theme. Platé has also encouraged playful podium jousting with his long-time counterparts across the



Provided by: North Carolina Economic Development Association

Greater Charlotte Metro and the State.

As his term as NCEDA President winds down this summer, Platé is proud to help advance NCEDA to the next level. "Standing on the shoulders of the past leaders, the organization can now focus on honing the value provided to the membership and continue to grow the expertise in the profession," he says. 🚀



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# Organizational Reform

## Brings Monroe and Union County Unique Benefits

By: Lawrence Bivins



### MONROE UNION COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

**A** rarely used statute on North Carolina's books enables Union County and the City of Monroe to collaborate more effectively in growing jobs and attracting economic investment. The County and the City moved last year to create the Monroe-Union County Economic Development Commission (MUCEDC), a partnership that smooths the way toward strategic continuity, flexibility, and accountability.

MUCEDC formerly operated as a line department of the City of Monroe but, through an Interlocal agreement, was responsible for all of Union County. As its responsibilities grew more extensive, leaders agreed on the need for an independent organization. "We needed to find a path toward independence and the capacity to serve both the city and the county equally," explains Patrick Kane, an attorney at Fox Rothchild who serves as MUCEDC's counsel. The organization tapped provisions in state law that allow for creating a "quasi-governmental" entity to provide economic development services. "It's similar in structure to a regional transportation authority," Kane says.

The new organization is responsive to the City and

the County, with a governing board consisting of two County Commissioners, two City Council Members, the City Manager, and the County Manager. "The arrangement enables us to stay within local government structures and allows the employees to stay within the local government retirement system," says Kane. "That is one of the big benefits of doing it this way."

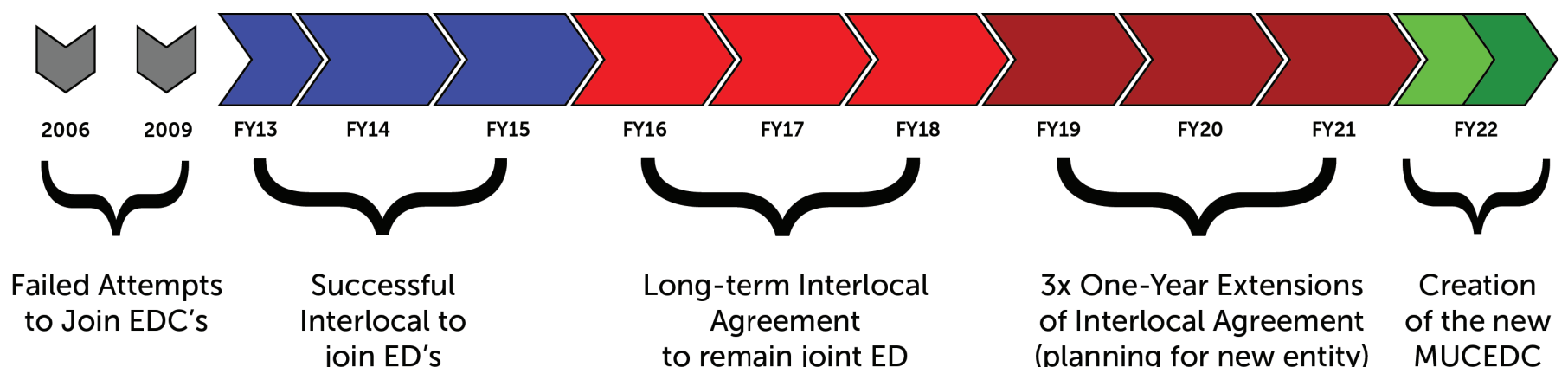
Monroe Mayor Marion Holloway, who is the vice-chair of the MUCEDC's board, says the move gives economic developers the flexibility to embrace emerging opportunities. "We took an organization that was responsible to two different boards and gave it its autonomy to experiment and think outside the box," Holloway says. "With our board and staff and the

expectations that have been set, it's a good solution for us," adds Holloway. "I'm excited about it."

Operating as a local government entity means MUCEDC must perform more transparently than most private, non-profit economic development organizations. For example, board meetings are open to the public, and there are additional layers of administrative reporting. "There's been nothing but upside," says Chris Platé, MUCEDC's executive director. The structure allows the organization to provide quality services across Union County. It is also flexible: should other opportunities arise, the

organization has the latitude to enter into additional contracts. "We can set up inter-local agreements with other municipalities around specific needs and functions," Platé says.

What does the new organizational status mean to companies and consultants considering Union County? "Clients don't notice anything different from the way we operated in the past," Platé explains. "To them, we have the benefits of being governed like a private entity, but with the validity of being part of the public sector; it makes us extremely effective in assisting new and existing companies." 🚀





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# Tapping Private Resources

## Gives Union County an “EDGE” in Creating Economic Success

By: Lawrence Bivins

**E**conomic development is primarily a public process wherein local governments lead the way in creating an environment that attracts outside wealth and grows jobs. But in Union County, the private sector is actively engaged in economic development programs and strategies, too.

The Union County Economic Development Growth

Enterprise (EDGE)

is a private non-profit organization established in 2018 to encourage business participation in the work of economic development in the City of Monroe and Union County. The organization holds events that connect local business leaders to each other while raising private



funds to augment city and county appropriations.

Chip Pope, senior vice president at Shelco, says participation in EDGE is his company's way of expressing confidence in Monroe-Union County Economic Development Commission. "We invest in EDGE because we believe in the leadership of Chris Platé and his team," says Pope, whose Charlotte-

based construction company is a leading commercial and industrial builder in the Carolinas. "It gives them the resources they need to continue the unbelievable work they've done for many years." Shelco's rationale for investing in EDGE is both broad and long-ranging. "A rising tide lifts all boats," Pope says. "If folks in our communities are doing well, we're doing well."

Other business leaders cite EDGE's networking value. As a relationship manager for Fifth Third Bank, Mitch Daratony relies on personal contact to promote his bank's financial management services to mid-sized businesses. Among

EDGE's social events are an annual holiday party and golf tournament. "For me as a relationship manager, it's been the best bang for my buck," says Daratony, whose Cincinnati-based bank is seeking to grow its market share in the southeastern U.S. Having been with Fifth Third Bank for about two years, he says EDGE has helped him cultivate meaningful business contacts across Union County. "EDGE has been pivotal in developing relationships with mid-market companies there," Daratony says. Though his work puts him in front of various economic development organizations around the region, not all of them are as proactive and

**“We invest in EDGE because we believe in the leadership of Chris Platé and his team.”**

**CHIP POPE**  
Shelco





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responsive as the MUCEDC team, he says. “Chris, Ron, and Rachael – they just get it.”

EDGE members also receive updates on Union County’s economy and business conditions. Myers & Chapman began participating in the program at a basic level three years ago. “In year two, we bumped it up,” says Dene Dawson, who leads business development for the 68-year-old commercial and industrial construction company. Dawson, a former economic developer with the North Carolina Department of Commerce, appreciates the information he receives from participating in EDGE and its events. “We have standing meetings that give us a regular touch with leaders in the community,” he says. “We’re in front of those leaders and get to know their needs.”



Provided by: Monroe-Union County EDC

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**NORTH CAROLINA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GUIDE 2023**

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Fred Edwards  
President & COO of Goulston Technologies



In 2023, the Charlotte, Triangle and Triad Business Journals will publish its first ever stand-alone guide to North Carolina’s workforce development services, and profile companies who want to share their workforce development features and benefits.

**PURPOSE**  
As the demand for skilled labor continues to surge, more and more organizations are debuting new workforce development programs. This guide provides employers a way to navigate this growing list of services to better understand how they can best serve their own workforce needs. This Workforce Development Guide will include a list of local programs and will publish in print and online on August 25, 2023.

**VALUE PROPOSITION**  
Showcase your organization’s Workforce Development offerings to an audience of business and community leaders in this exclusive Statewide special publication.

**AD SPACE DEADLINE**

JULY 14, 2023

**CONTENT DEADLINE**

JULY 28, 2023

**PUBLICATION DATE**

AUGUST 25, 2023

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**ROB TALLMAN** at [rtallman@bizjournals.com](mailto:rtallman@bizjournals.com) or 704.973.1127



# UNION COUNTY, NC

POPULATION: 260,000+

## Industry Assets:

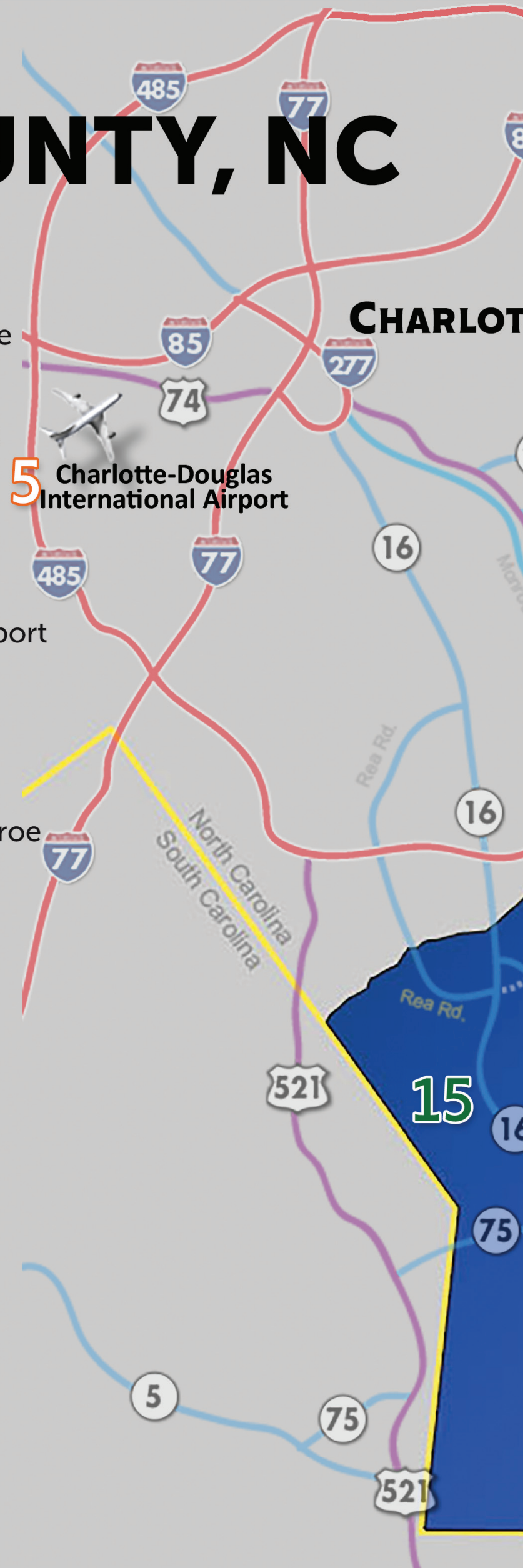
- 1a) South Piedmont Community College
- 1b) SPCC Tyson Center for Technology
- 2) Charlotte-Monroe Executive Airport
- 3a) Wingate University
- 3b) BARN facility
- 4) Union County Ag Center
- 5) Charlotte-Douglas International Airport

## Industrial Parks / Areas:

- 6) Monroe Corporate Center
- 7) Expressway Commerce Park @ Monroe
- 8) Union County Industrial Park (new)
- 9) Sutton Park
- 10) Marshville Rail Site
- 12) Old Hickory Park
- 13) Industrial Ventures I & II

## Parks:

- 14) Cane Creek Park
- 15) Efirid Park
- 16) Stallings Park
- 17) Chestnut Square Park
- 18) Crooked Creek Park
- 19) Monroe Aquatics & Fitness Center
- 20) Jesse Helms Park

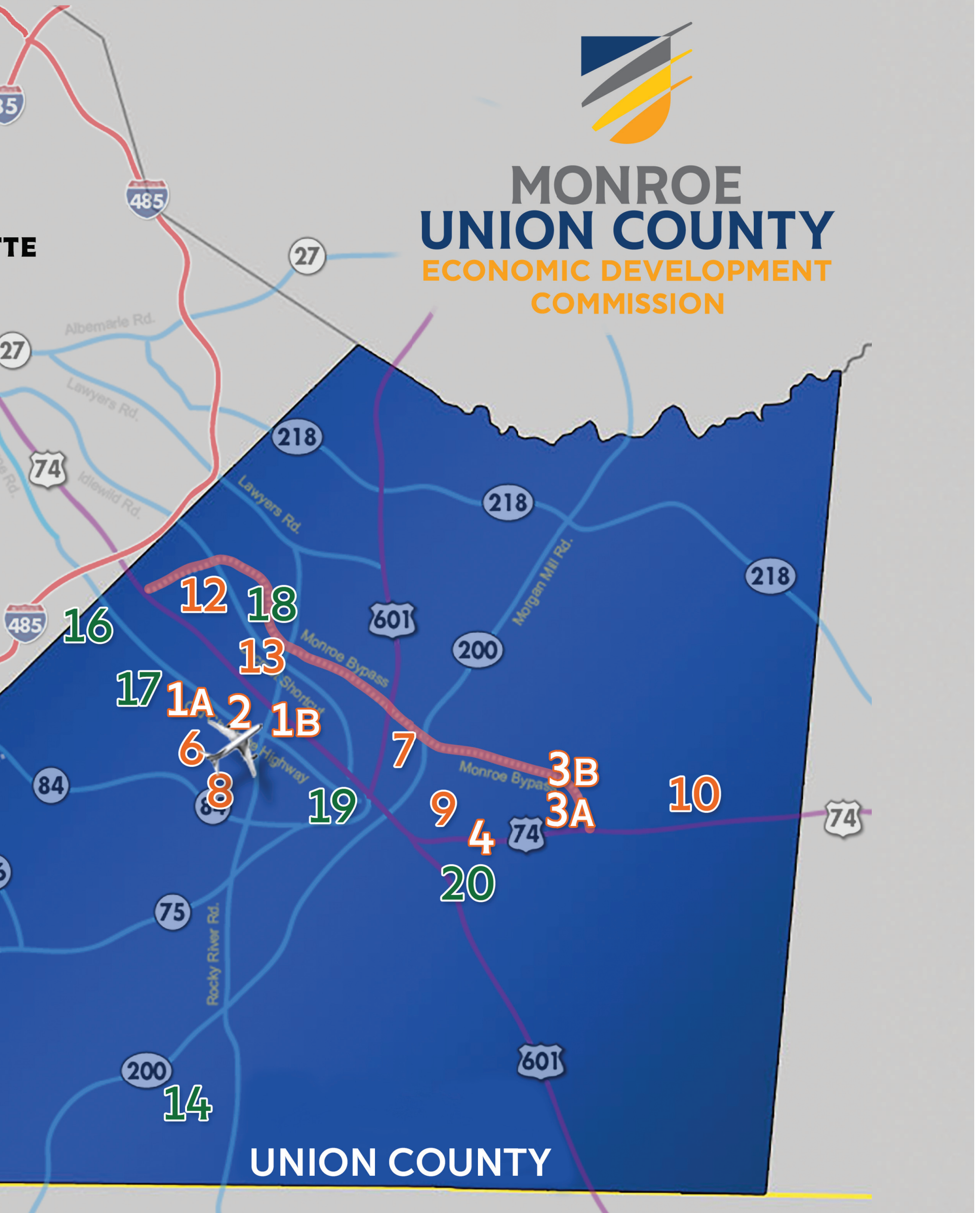






# MONROE UNION COUNTY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION





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# Wingate University

## Vision Builds Bridge to the Future

By: Lawrence Bivins

**V**isionary leadership plus the completion of a long-awaited piece of transportation infrastructure is creating an exciting new era for the Town of Wingate and the namesake university that is its largest landowner.

“When we heard the expressway was coming, we knew we wanted to be at the table,” says Rhett Brown, President of Wingate University, a campus of 3,400 students that Brown calls “the Greater Charlotte Metro’s premiere private institution.” The 2018 completion of the Monroe Expressway, an 18-mile stretch of limited access toll road, offered the exciting possibility that the University and the town could reduce the economic disparities between the western and eastern crescents of Union County. “We knew development would be coming our way, and we wanted to help,” he stated. In the last ten years, Wingate University has

added significant acreage to its footprint, which now totals more than 500 acres. It has assembled a master plan that includes space for private research and development facilities, new graduate and professional students housing, additional recreational amenities, and a 55+ living community. The plan could move the center of gravity of Wingate, a town of nearly 4,000 year-round residents. “People are enthusiastic,” says Brown, who has served as the

university’s president since 2015. “They see the value.”

As an economic engine for Union County, Wingate University’s value has never been in doubt. It generates \$8.4 million in student spending through the region’s economy each year, on top of \$5 million in construction outlays and \$5.4 million in yearly visitor receipts. According to an analysis by UNC Charlotte economist John Connaughton, Union County realizes \$168 million

in combined direct, indirect, and induced economic impact each year.

Its educational leadership role also is formidable: 56 percent of its enrollees are first-generation college-going students, and 41 percent of Wingate undergraduates receive need-based financial aid. “I want our student body to reflect the community where we live and work,” says Brown, who was once a first-generation college student at Wingate. “It comes

### PROPOSED CONCEPT OF THE BARN FACILITY



Provided by: Monroe-Union County EDC



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with challenges but makes for a richer, more fascinating college experience.” More fascinating still has been the University’s emergence as an economic development player. “We can be a convener for a lot of the things happening in our community,” Brown says. The campus, for example, is a critical partner in Union County’s “BARN” initiative – Building Agricultural Resources and Nutrition. That vision focuses on a 30,000-square-foot facility that would support local farmers, food processors, and agribusiness entrepreneurs. Plans call for BARN to operate on university-owned land near the Monroe Expressway.

Other partners include the Monroe-Union County Economic Development Commission (MUCEDC), the county’s Cooperative Extension, Union County, and the Town of Wingate. “Wingate is such a good ally for us,” says Chris Platé, executive director of MUCEDC. “They’ve been proactive in agriculture and food systems.” Last fall, the University enrolled its inaugural student class of a new food system concentration offered to biology majors, the campus’s most popular major. Wingate leaders, along with Platé and Cooperative Extension Director Andrew Baucom, hope the new curriculum helps address food insecurity issues in Union County and energizes the local agribusiness sector. Wingate Provost Jeff Frederick says the University’s economic

and community engagement runs against the traditional grain of most private liberal arts institutions, which traditionally sought insulation from off-campus trends and pressures. “We’re trying to be responsive to the economic and educational needs,” Frederick says. “That includes agricultural innovation – Union County’s number one industry – and making our voices heard on issues like infrastructure.” The University is positioned to help bridge the urban-rural divide and work to boost prosperity in Anson County to the east or inner-city Charlotte to the west. “These are long-term plays that involve short-term improvements,” according to Frederick, a longtime professor of Southern history. “Ten to 15 years from now, this whole part of the county may look very different.”

**“We’re trying to be responsive to the economic and educational needs... That includes agricultural innovation – Union County’s number one industry – and making our voices heard on issues like infrastructure.”**

**JEFF FREDERICK**  
Wingate University



Provided by: Wingate University



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# 20 Years:

## Union County's Aerospace Cluster Sparks Broad Benefits

By: Lawrence Bivins

**F**or over 20 years now, Union County's aerospace and aviation cluster has continued to build on the strength of its scale and diversification. Not even the travel disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic could slow the momentum of the companies growing and flourishing in the City of Monroe and Union County. Fueled by a reliable flow of industry-ready workers, modest business costs, and convenient access to buyers, Union County has proven to be the destination of choice for aerospace jobs and investment over the past two decades.

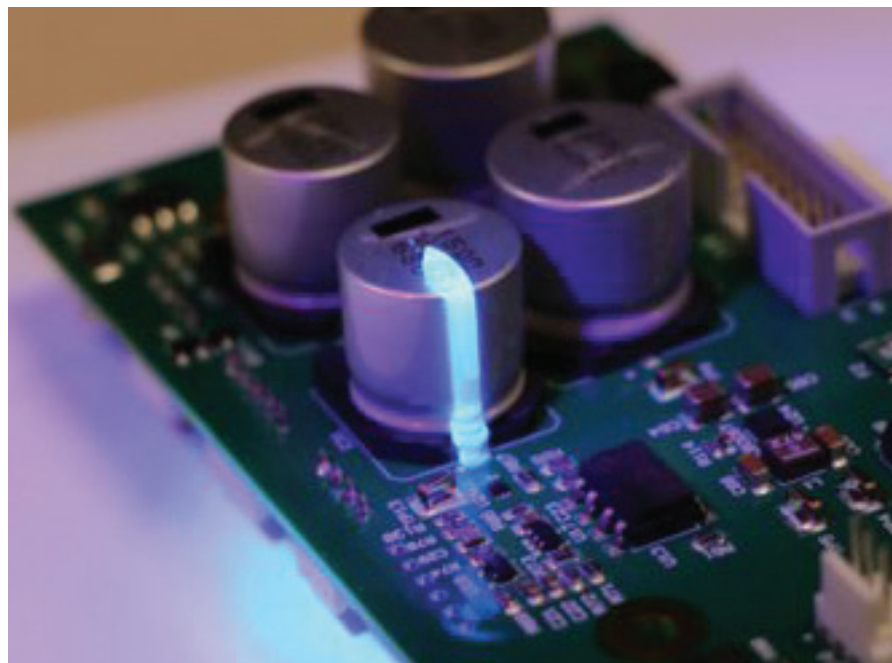
Last summer witnessed two major moves forward for the cluster. First, Collins Aerospace cut the ribbon on a \$45 million expansion in Monroe that includes a new additive manufacturing center and additional space and workforce at its maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facility in the Monroe Corporate Center. Collins' new manufacturing center joins a global network of additive production sites maintained by the company, which is a subsidiary of Raytheon Technologies. Its MRO operations in Union County repair military and commercial aircraft components and is the largest of its 75 MRO facilities globally.

A few days later, DYMAX Corporation, a major supplier of adhesives and coatings to aerospace and other industries, unveiled plans to invest nearly \$47 million in manufacturing, distribution, and office space near Charlotte-Monroe Executive Airport. The move brings 227 new jobs at annual wages averaging more than \$66,000. The

Connecticut-based company is now working on the pre-construction plans of its 100,000+ square foot building.

"We've been in the game a long time and now have one of the largest aerospace clusters in the state," says Chris Platé, Executive Director of the Monroe-Union County Economic Development Commission (MUCEDC). His efforts now center on continuing to build out the more lucrative points on the industry's value chain. "We want to add to the pieces that we have – bringing in more additive manufacturing and other integrated components," Platé says. Those segments relate to high-precision welding, electronics, avionics, and industrial maintenance. Workforce assets will continue to drive the cluster's growth. "Such growth requires education and training leadership from Union County Public Schools and South Piedmont Community College (SPCC)," Platé says.

One company pleased with



Provided by: DYMAX



Provided by: Midway Aerospace



Provided by: City of Monroe





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**“The airshow is another economic development tool in our toolbox to showcase our airport and aerospace industry.”**

**PETE HOVANEC**  
City of Monroe

the support it is getting from SPCC is Midway Aerospace. The company is a unit of France’s Dassault Aviation, which makes military and business jets. Midway Aerospace arrived in Monroe in March 2013 and operates a business jet component repair facility. It has tapped into SPCC’s corporate training services to provide company employees with additional welding skills to complement Midway’s in-house training. “The welding training was an excellent program, and I would definitely work with them again,” says Kelli Venchierutti, Site Director

at Midway Aerospace. SPCC even provided the company accommodations for new-hire orientation in 2013 while its facility near the Charlotte-Monroe Executive Airport was readied. More recently, Midway was awarded on-the-job training grants from the Centralina Workforce Development Board at the suggestion of SPCC. “It has been a great partnership,” says Venchierutti.

Pete Hovanec, longtime Communications & Tourism Director for the City of Monroe, says the aerospace and aviation cluster has spun

off benefits elsewhere in the local economy. He cites the city’s annual airshow, “Warbirds Over Monroe,” as bringing publicity, visitor spending, and tax revenue to the community. The military-themed event, held each Veterans Day, features 40-50 World War II-era aircraft. “We’re attracting from 30,000 to 50,000 people to Monroe during that week,” says Hovanec. Attendees come from as far away as Europe and Asia. Warbirds Over Monroe, which started 15 years ago, also includes about 60 vendors. “The airshow is another economic development tool in our toolbox to showcase our airport and aerospace industry,” he says.

Additional tourism dollars are also arriving in the wake of the opening earlier this year of the



Monroe Science Center. Named in honor of Dr. Christine Darden, the aerospace engineer, and Union County

native whose pioneering work inspired the film “Hidden Figures.” The 16,000-square-foot museum’s hands-on exhibits, organized around aerospace and the county’s other major industries, include a flight simulator. “It’s all about learning,” Hovanec says of the \$3.5 million center, which Charlotte’s Discovery Place inspired. The New York native, who has lived and worked in Union County for 25 years, says local aerospace companies have driven an economic transformation that has touched on tourism, residential development, retail, and entertainment. “People are flocking here, and aerospace plays a huge role in that,” says Hovanec. 🚀

**MEMBERS OF THE AEROSPACE CLUSTER**





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# Meet the staff

## of Monroe-Union County Economic Development Commission



**CHRIS PLATÉ**  
Executive Director

Chris Platé is Executive Director of the Monroe-Union County Economic Development Commission, where he leads a five-person team in executing business development initiatives on behalf of Union County and its 14 municipalities. Platé has worked to bring jobs and investment to Union County and Monroe since 1999 when he arrived after serving in economic development positions in York and Chester counties, South Carolina. Before economic development, he worked as a Business Analyst for Moody's Investors Service. Platé's industrial business marketing and recruitment expertise includes establishing the Aerospace Initiative in Monroe in 2002. The cluster has since become internationally prominent and now employs nearly 4,500 employees across 24 companies inside a seven-mile radius, making it the highest geographic concentration of aerospace firms in the Carolinas. In 2016, the North Carolina Economic Development Association (NCEA) named Platé NC Economic Developer of the Year. He holds a B.S. in Economics from Clemson University, with dual minors in Law and Political Science. Platé has been married for over 24 years and is the father of two children.

*"It has been the highest honor to represent Monroe and Union County for nearly a quarter century. The support from our elected leaders has enabled us to build an incredibly diverse economy anchored in precision manufacturing, specifically the internationally-recognized aerospace cluster. While winning projects and bringing in large taxpayers to the community is very satisfying, the jobs we bring and the lives we impact make this career the most fulfilling."*

- Chris Platé



**RON MAHLE**  
Assistant Director

Existing Industry Manager Ron Mahle joined the City of Monroe's Department of Economic Development Commission in 2005 and was the Existing Industry Coordinator until being promoted to Assistant Director in 2009. Ron connects existing Union County manufacturers and other employers with local, state, and federal resources. In addition, Ron was instrumental in initiating the Monroe-Union County Manufacturing Awareness Campaign, a strategy that promotes modern manufacturing as a preferred career choice for local youth. Ron has more than 20 years of economic development experience at the municipal level. He holds a B.A. in History and Political Science from Hiram College of Ohio and an MPA from Cleveland State University. Ron and his wife and daughter reside in Mint Hill, NC.

*"At its core, economic development is all about improving the quality of life for the people who live and work in Union County. Working with its community partners, this office has created thousands of well-paying jobs and achieved billions of dollars of capital investment. The positive impact our work has on people's lives and seeing Union County continue to thrive is why I feel honored to do this work."*

- Ron Mahle



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**RACHAEL HOLZMAN**  
New Opportunities Manager

Rachael Holzman joined the Monroe-Union County Economic Development Commission team in 2021 as New Opportunities Manager. She recently graduated from North Carolina State University's College of Agriculture & Life Sciences. Rachael brings unique experience from her undergraduate studies in Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems and Agriculture Business Management, honing skills that enhance the organization's ambitious Agri-Business Initiative. During college, she interned at the Union County Cooperative Extension Service and worked part-time as the Assistant Local Foods Coordinator. A native North Carolinian, Rachael returned home to Union County after graduation, eager to serve her community. She is passionate about supporting local agriculture and businesses and building a resilient economy in Union County. Rachael resides locally with her black lab puppy.

*"It is a great privilege to have the chance to promote Monroe and Union County, NC, for recruitment and marketing purposes. However, it is important to recognize that our success is rooted in the support of our current industries, wonderful residents, and overall high quality of life. I take pride in showcasing our community's merits to national and international companies as we strive to enhance our collective growth."*

- Rachael Holzman



**LYNELL HILLHOUSE**  
Resource Manager

Resource Manager Lynell Hillhouse has served on the economic development team since 2016. She has more than 15 years of experience with Union County municipalities, serving as Administrative Support Specialist, Interim Town Clerk / Deputy Town Clerk, and Economic Development Specialist, in addition to her experience in Tax and Revenue Collection. Lynell began a career in banking in her native Australia, continuing in the industry after arriving in the United States in 1995. While stationed at Scott AFB in Belleville, Illinois, she studied banking at the American Institute of Banking and also earned a certification in Early Childhood Education through the US Air Force. A US citizen since 2009, Lynell is proud to be a veteran's spouse. She and her husband resided in Union County for 17 years while raising their three sons, who are now adults.

*"I thoroughly enjoy assisting local industries with their incentive grant requests as it allows me to develop individual relationships. A personal connection with industry representatives creates a strong foundation for working together in the future."*

- Lynell Hillhouse



**TERESA MALCOM**  
Office Manager & Board Clerk

Teresa Malcom serves as the organization's Office Manager and the Board's clerk. She joined the economic development team in 2021 after working as a Medical Office Assistant and Senior Administrative Assistant in the healthcare industry for over 20 years. Teresa currently attends UNC School of Government in Chapel Hill, where she is on track to earn her Certified Municipal Clerk designation at the end of 2023. She moved to Union County from New York more than 25 years ago and proudly calls North Carolina home. Teresa resides locally with her husband and daughter.

*"I am so proud to be a part of the Monroe-Union County Economic Development Commission. I look forward to helping our team bridge the immense opportunities available in Monroe and Union County and working with our industry partners to grow our region."*

- Teresa Malcom





# union county north carolina

*Located to the southeast of Charlotte and adjacent to I-485, Union County is home to as much diversity in one County as there is in the state of North Carolina. The Gateway region of the County, nearest to Charlotte, is a well-developed area, optimally suited for corporate offices and distribution locations. The central portion of the county has developed a strong base in precision manufacturing, most notably in aerospace, and has the state's highest concentration of aerospace companies - 24 companies in a seven mile radius. Agriculture reigns supreme on the eastern side of the County, where production of soybeans, corn and broiler chickens ranks among the highest in North Carolina. These attributes, along with the County's strong workforce development pipeline from the public schools, South Piedmont Community College and Wingate University, combine to make Union County the ideal location for many businesses to call home.*

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