

## Welcome, and thanks for your interest in Lee County!

The pace of change in our world has never been greater, but in Lee County, we've harnessed that dynamism to our advantage while maintaining the vitality of our rich agricultural heritage and preserving our outstanding quality of life. County and municipal leaders have collaborated on a shared vision for our future, and we have made significant investments in ourselves:

A new terminal and hangars at the thriving Raleigh Executive Jetport, W.B. Wicker STEAM elementary school, Central Carolina Community College's E. Eugene Moore Manufacturing and Biotech Solutions Center, the Buggy Building, a "one stop shop" for growth and development, Depot Park and the Historic Downtown streetscape, a multi-purpose sports complex, a new public library and more...

As a result of this visionary leadership and investment by the public sector, Lee County and its two municipalities, Sanford and Broadway, are currently at the epicenter of unprecedented business and residential investment by the private sector. Global industry leaders like Pfizer, Caterpillar and Coty have operated highly successful advanced manufacturing facilities in Lee County for decades and have recently invested in significant expansions.

Central Carolina Enterprise Park (CCEP), with its certified industrial sites, Class A shell building program, and strategic location just minutes from I-540 and the world-renowned Research Triangle, has prompted companies like Astellas Gene Therapies and Abzena to invest hundreds of millions to upfit the first two shell buildings in CCEP and create hundreds of well-paid new jobs in the life sciences sector.

Sanford's strategic investments in water and sewer infrastructure have long sustained our local economy, and significant new investments have positioned Lee County to be a leader in the burgeoning EV industry supply chain. Bharat Forge Aluminum USA has already completed the first phase of its cutting-edge facility for the manufacture of lightweight aluminum parts, and Vietnamese EV manufacturer VinFast has announced a massive new investment and job creation in nearby Moncure, creating regional employment and supply chain opportunities and generating major ripple effects across Lee County's entire economic ecosystem.

Private investors continue to capitalize on Lee County's vision, with thousands of new residential units approved for construction, and more than a thousand acres of new industrial sites under development as well. On behalf of the Sanford Area Growth Alliance and all our public and private sector partners and investors, we're excited to share our story with you in this special section. We invite you to connect with us directly to discover how you and your business can become a part of the next chapter of Lee County's amazing success story.





# LOOKING INWARD, SEEING AHEAD

Lee County is developing its offerings, making it attractive to new residents and businesses.

Draw a line on a map that encircles Raleigh, Greensboro and Fayetteville. Right in the center, you'll find Lee County. Its position is a result of simple geography. But it also reflects its importance to economic development efforts in the region, says Sanford Area Growth Alliance CEO Jimmy Randolph. "We have [Central Carolina Community College] that is a jewel in the crown of the state Community College System and serves three counties in Lee, Harnett and Chatham, and there are a great number of potential employees moving through that system," he says. "And the U.S. 1 corridor from Raleigh to Southern Pines, we're central to that route. [Lee County seat] Sanford is central to this dynamic region."

Lee County and its communities offer new businesses and residents more than workforce training and a central location. Quality of life is being improved. Health care is expanding. And historical industries, such as agriculture, are being re-envisioned and revamped. Randolph says county leaders and residents are always looking to the future. "Time and again, we have invested significant financial resources for infrastructure development, understanding that we were investing in a shared vision for the future,





The Raleigh Executive Jetport in Sanford is used for corporate flights and recreational aviation.

not just reacting to the immediate needs of today," he says. "Due to our strategic location in the center of North Carolina, our foresight and strategic investments consistently benefit folks far beyond the geographic borders of our relatively small county. We are a community of makers, a great place not only for large companies but for entrepreneurs. We're a great place to bring your ideas."

The efforts are attracting new businesses. Service Offsite Solutions, for example, announced in March that it's building an \$11.8 million factory in Sanford, where it will create 235 jobs and make modular floors, walls and roofs for buildings. North Carolina Railroad's economic development initiative — NCRRI Invests — will spend \$300,000 to add a rail spur at the site. It will allow Atlantic and Western Railway to serve the new factory, moving about 150 more rail cars a year.

Other companies are receiving support, too. Sanford, in an

agreement with Chatham County, is using a \$50 million grant from Golden LEAF Foundation, which distributes the state's portion of the national tobacco settlement for economic development projects, to provide water and sewer to 2,500-acre Triangle Innovation Point, the former Moncure Megasite. Vietnamese automaker VinFast recently announced plans to build a \$4 billion electric vehicle plant there, creating at least 7,500 jobs. Production is expected to begin in mid-2024.

It was Lee County's foresight — a decade ago — that led to the water deal. "The megasite property owner originally reached out to the city of Sanford to supply wastewater treatment," says Vic Czar, Sanford's public works director. "The city of Sanford then partnered with Lee County, Chatham County and Golden LEAF to extend sewer from the Big Buffalo Wastewater Treatment Facility to the megasite."

Lee County and Sanford

collaborated to bring the line to the Raleigh Executive Jetport, then the county, with Golden LEAF's support, extended it to Triangle Innovation Point. "This partnership made the megasite ready for industry," Czar says. "When the site became a front-runner for VinFast, Chatham County needed a partner to meet the company's expansive water demands. Partnering with Sanford was a natural fit, as Sanford is water-rich, and the two governments have such a great working relationship."

Sanford will receive 20% of property taxes collected from companies connected to the system. "This arrangement benefits all involved," Czar says. "Chatham County and Lee County residents will have access to high-paying, quality jobs. VinFast will have the infrastructure it needs to be competitive in the market. Sanford's utility system will have the diversity of rate payers along with the additional revenue brought by the property tax."

Czar expects Sanford's foresight to continue attracting businesses. "None of this would be possible without the infrastructure provided by Sanford," he says. "VinFast's decision to locate at Triangle Innovation Point will have a significant impact on Chatham and Lee counties."

## IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

Lee County officials are making life better for current and future residents, many of whom will fill recently announced jobs. "The communities of Sanford and Broadway have invested in themselves for the future, and

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"Honestly, it's the people, because you have a great educational system, you have three top-notch universities, you have a lot of community colleges and good high schools, so that produces talent."

Amit Kalyani  
Bharat Forge

460 Jobs, \$170.9M Investment  
August 2019

"What really drove us was the interaction we had with the mayor and local government officials... They brought everybody up for us. No one else did that."

Don Wuchterl  
Audentes

209 Jobs, \$109M Investment  
February 2020

"North Carolina offers great resources for access to a talented workforce and other resources for us as we bring the new facility on-line."

Kimball Hall  
Abzena

325 Jobs, \$213M Investment  
April 2021

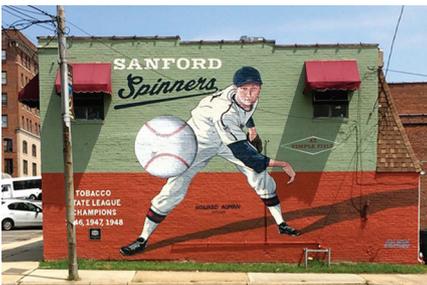
## SANFORD-LEE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA



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The Public Arts Initiative, which includes many murals, promotes Sanford's roots and honors its hometown heroes.

it's led to opportunities," says John Dean, SAGA's economic development manager. "We see a new library coming online, new parks, new greenways, and we're investing in ourselves and our infrastructure to create new job growth. And it's important to Sanford and Lee County to not lose sight of that."

SAGA's Randolph agrees. "We're investing in ourselves as a community, and some of that — like the downtown streetscapes with the utilities underground and the historic theme of street lights — have made it a much more inviting place," he says. "It's been more than a \$6 million investment, but it's really paid off."

A \$25 million bond referendum for a multisports complex was approved by Lee County voters in 2020, two years after it was proposed. Plans, which were submitted in April, include fields for baseball, softball, football, lacrosse and soccer, along with playground equipment, 2 miles of walking trails and a splash pad. Once plans are approved, construction is expected to take 18 to 24 months. "It's the idea of investing in ourselves and the quality of life for residents and visitors," Randolph says. "So, we've also undertaken renovations at all our neighborhood parks. Some places may not see the value in that, but we do. And we're experiencing it."

Lee County Manager John Crumpton says the multisports complex will offer year-round recreational opportunities. "As we move forward, the commissioners and key stakeholders will be discussing the naming of not

only the park but also of major facilities within the complex," he says. "Central Carolina Community College has expressed interest in starting men's and women's soccer programs using these fields. The county also has contracted with the Sanford Spinners [baseball team] of the Old North State Summer College League to play games at the county's Tramway Park. The Spinners will move to the sports complex when it is finished. This facility will serve as a community and regional asset for years to come, hosting events that will contribute to area businesses, expand recreational opportunities and serve as a marketing tool for tourism and development."

The multisports complex's beginnings can be traced to 2013, when Sanford voters approved a \$2 million parks-and-recreation bond to expand Kiwanis Family Park. A community survey, parks master plan and work with a consulting firm followed in 2015. The master plan covers four more county parks, which have upgraded parking and new basketball and tennis courts and playgrounds. "After the master plan was completed, the commissioners borrowed additional money when the W.B. Wicker School [was refurbished to become the county's ninth elementary school] to address Phase One at these parks," says county Park and Recreation Director Joseph Keel. "Phase One grew from \$2 million to over \$4 million of funding invested in park improvements. The county also is in the process of upgrading the mountain bike trails at San-Lee Park. The county

is investing \$200,000 into the redesign of the Gravity Park and single-track trails in the park and recently acquired an additional 16 acres of property to add parking and trails in the near future. The amount of use and attendance in our parks is remarkable following improvements. Parks truly bring the community together.”

From housing to retail to roads, improvements and developments are underway across the county and region, many under the direction of hometown Carolina Commercial Contractors and Sanford Contractors. They are improving quality of life, as are walkable downtowns. A bond referendum to fund upgrades to

downtown streetscapes in Sanford and Jonesboro has invited a wave of private-sector investment. “There are new restaurants opening up,” Dean says. “You can walk on the greenways. We’re in an urban environment where you can walk everywhere. And it’s a place where no matter your age, no matter who you are, you can be a leader. You have opportunities here to make a difference. The trajectory is that there’s no turning back. The growth is coming, and I think it’s important that we embrace it.”

## AUGMENTING AGRICULTURE

Broadway, which covers just 1.3 square miles and counted

1,256 residents in 2019, according to N.C. Office of State Budget and Management, is a small town east of Sanford with deep agricultural roots. But its attraction is large for many people, especially those wanting to work in the nearby Triangle while owning land and enjoying a rural lifestyle. “Broadway has done a terrific job of leveraging its agricultural heritage,” Dean says. “Broadway has had a very strong history with brick-making then textiles and now advanced manufacturing, and we’re staying relevant with the manufacturing industry. The same can be said with agriculture. We have a diverse agriculture system with new technology, and Project Payton is

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an example of that.”

Project Payton, which was planted with research from N.C. State University and cultivated by SAGA, is a research-and-development farm set for 100 acres in Broadway and Apex in Wake County. Inside its 10,000- to 20,000-square-foot test lab and greenhouses, the focus will be stevia. A naturally sweet sugar substitute is derived from its leaves. Dean says Broadway has 45 acres currently under production.

Plant Pathways, a seed company that specializes in improving stevia varieties, will look at ways to grow more stevia and develop innovations from it. “The company wants to work with obesity and sustainable agriculture,” Dean says. “It’s a direct correlation between N.C. State University and the new Plant Sciences Initiative. And we see Broadway and Lee County as a place for this new agriculture. With

the new Plant Sciences Initiative and Project Payton, it shows what’s possible in the future of agriculture in Lee County.”

N.C. State’s Plant Sciences Initiative aims to advance agriculture, developing approaches and products that feed more people on less land and under changing conditions. The university dedicated its \$160 million Plant Sciences Building in April. It has 80,000 square feet of research labs and 16,000 square feet of greenhouses.

## EXPANDING EDUCATION

Investments in Lee County’s future happen every day at Central Carolina Community College. The biggest underway is the E. Eugene Moore Manufacturing and Biotech Solutions Center. It’s planned for the former site of Magneti Marelli, an Italian auto-parts manufacturer

that closed in 2021. Lee County spent \$7.4 million to purchase the 22-acre property and its empty factory, which is adjacent to CCCC’s campus and turned it over for job-training purposes.

Funding will determine when the Solutions Center opens, says Margaret Robertson, CCCC’s vice president of workforce development. “Central Carolina Community College is committed to the success of the Moore Solutions Center and is dedicating college resources to its development. But that timeline will be significantly accelerated with additional support from our state and local partners.”

VinFast is interested in using the solutions center to train workers for its Chatham County plant. And CCCC is working with other regional businesses, including drugmaker Pfizer and manufacturers Bharat Forge, Boon Edam and A.D. TUBI, to develop custom training for their workers. “This includes awareness, recruitment and skills attainment for adult job seekers, CCCC students, high school students and incumbent workers,” she says. “The college is also working with local manufacturers within the Central Carolina Manufacturing Institute to identify recruitment and training needs for the many manufacturing occupations in the region.”

Robertson says workforce training will be phased in as the former factory is converted, with biotechnology, CDL and logistics, and custom space for VinFast training first on the list. “The facility will impact job creation both directly through CCCC faculty and staff needed to expand current programs and increase capacity to meet industry needs as well as indirectly



Plans for the new multisports complex in Lee County include fields for baseball, softball, football, lacrosse and soccer, along with playground equipment, 2 miles of walking trails and a splash pad.



“Over many years, we’ve enjoyed the convenient location and personal service at Raleigh Exec, which is why we recently invested in building a major corporate hangar at the airport. As more companies learn about the advantages it offers, I’m sure they’ll also be making the decision to operate out of Raleigh Exec.”

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by attracting regional training, supporting business growth and manufacturing business incubation," she says.

Crystal Glenn has been named executive director of the Center, which will be the largest of its type in the state when complete. Robertson says it will offer quick access to interstates and airports; state-of-the-art training equipment for biotechnology, computer integrated machining, industrial automation, robotics and 3D printing; space for entrepreneurs; a workforce recruiting center; and resources available through college partnerships with National Science Foundation, National Institute for Innovation in Manufacturing Biopharmaceuticals, N.C. State University Manufacturing Extension Partnership, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Labor and N.C. Community College System. She says it will be a game-changer for workforce and economic recruitment in Lee County, the region and the state.

Workforce development

begins in Lee County's high schools. They offer a Career & College Promise program and career technical education clusters in agricultural and food, architecture, arts, communication, business, finance, health science, hospitality and tourism, human services, information technology, manufacturing, and marketing. Life-sciences programs will be added this fall. "We have these career academies, and we try to do as much as we can to tie them in with internships in the community and also give students the soft skills they need to be successful," says Andy Bryan, Lee County Schools superintendent. "Our community is very united in working together to promote economic development for our citizens. There are a lot of good people working together."

High school students in Career & College Promise earn college credits and certifications in their chosen career through CCCC. And after graduation, Lee County residents are guaranteed two years of free tuition at CCCC while pursuing

work experience. Bryan says in the last six years, Lee County high school students completed about 16,000 college courses, and 276 students left high school with an associate degree during that time. Some of them step into jobs at local companies, including Mertek Solutions in Sanford. It develops and builds automated machinery for manufacturers.

Local companies are behind these programs' success. They include Caterpillar, which has manufactured building-construction equipment in Sanford for more than 20 years. "[It's] an apprentice program in which students apply the second semester of their sophomore year [of high school] and take classes at CCCC to become certified in welding," Bryan says. "And that's tied into an apprenticeship at Caterpillar. So, they're leaving high school with a diploma and a welding certificate from the community college and real work experience that hopefully can lead to employment with that company."

Lee Early College High School

is offered on the CCCC campus. It offers academically advanced students the coursework to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate degree. "Our school system takes an approach called 'More than a Diploma,' which means we encourage students to earn certifications, credentials and dual enrollment credits to add value to their diploma," Bryan says. "We have career coaches in our high schools. It's tough sometimes for people to figure out what they want to do, and we try to provide opportunities and pathways for them to figure it out."

## ADDING HEALTH CARE

Central Carolina Hospital in Sanford has more than 100

physicians practicing in a range of specialties, including cardiology, orthopedics, general surgery and pulmonary medicine. The Duke LifePoint hospital also has 137 beds, an ER, occupational therapy, rehab, and maternity and cardiac care.

Lee County residents also receive medical care through FirstHealth of the Carolinas, which opened its Lee County campus in 2018. CEO Mickey Foster grew up in the count. He says that gives him a personal interest in recent expansions. "For decades, residents of Lee County have trusted FirstHealth to provide quality health care," he says. "With the region poised for dynamic growth in years to come, FirstHealth is expanding

its deep commitment to meet the needs of Lee County residents, the business community and the surrounding communities."

FirstHealth has provided emergency medical services to Lee since last year and recently opened its third Convenient Care Clinic location in Sanford. Foster says it has plans to expand access to primary care providers in Lee County. It also has partnered with nearby Pinehurst Surgical Clinic and Pinehurst Medical Clinic. "Families in Lee County and beyond now have greater access to specialty medical services including gynecologic oncology, OB/GYN, orthopedics, urology, vascular and vein, and more," he says. "Convenient Care Clinics offer non-emergency care



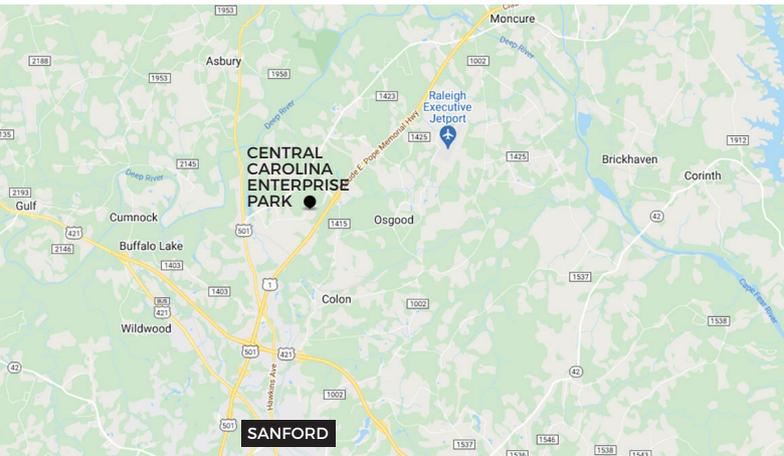
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for a full range of needs, including acute illness and ailments such as broken bones, lacerations and more. FirstHealth also recently partnered with Sandhills Neurologists to expand neuroscience services in Lee and the surrounding counties.”

FirstHealth is offering occupational health and wellness services to the Lee County business community. “Occupational health services are offered through on-site clinics, mobile clinics or at any of the Convenient Care locations,” Foster says. “From biometric screenings and DOT physicals to general acute care, the service provides the business community with a local and convenient option for employees.”

The Pinehurst-based health system also has a wellness program for executives. Customizable and comprehensive, it’s offered through concierge medicine physicians. “[It’s for] busy executives whose health is

sometimes neglected in a high-paced work environment,” Foster says.

## READYING FOR THE FUTURE

Central Carolina Enterprise Park in Sanford attracts business deals to Lee County. San Diego-based life-sciences company Abzena announced its \$213 million plan to locate in a 117,000-square-foot building at the park in April 2021. It’s expected to create 325 jobs. Randolph says N.C. Department of Commerce, CCCC, Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina and others collaborated on the deal.

A year earlier, San Francisco-based Audentes Therapeutics chose CCEP for its 135,000-square-foot factory, passing over sites in California, Massachusetts and Colorado. The average annual wage at the factory is expected to be about \$83,900, more than Lee

County’s \$45,743, according to N.C. Department of Commerce. And in January, Liberty Tire Recycling said it will open a factory, which will create about 30 jobs, at the same park. It will make rubberized mulch from scrap tires. “We are still showing lots at CCEP to perspective companies, including life-science manufacturers, food processors and distributors, and other advanced manufacturers,” Dean says. “Interest remains high.”

Randolph says CCEP is the product of a collaboration that includes SAGA, Lee County, Sanford and local private investors. He says the certified industrial park offers ready sites and an aggressive shell-building program facilitated by investors and [construction company] Samet Corp. That increases speed to market, he says. “Lee County’s forward-thinking leadership and entrepreneurial approach to economic development



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is a virtuous circle of collaboration, innovation and strategic investment, valuing our past, but embracing the future, ever vigilant and attuned to the next opportunity for investment,” he says.

Dean says preparing for future success is a full-time effort in this corner of North Carolina. “We’re investing in infrastructure and creating job growth, and it’s important for Sanford and Lee County not to lose sight of that,” he says. “I think for a long time Lee County has been an example of progress, and we’re continuing to do that and to see into the future.” ■

— Kathy Blake is a writer from eastern North Carolina.

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