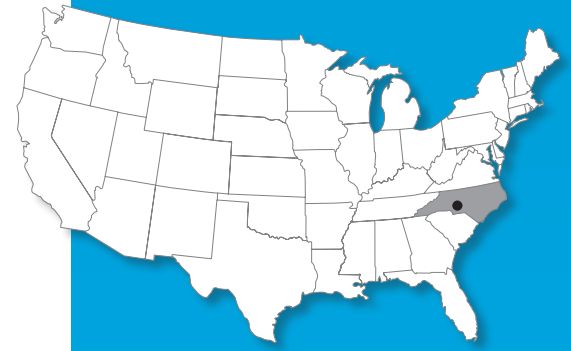


Wadesboro, North Carolina



	Wadesboro
Population (2000)	3,550
Municipal budget (2005)	\$2 million ¹¹⁹
Per capita income (2000)	\$14,500
Median household income (2000)	\$23,300
Poverty rate (2000)	25%
Minority population (2000)	58%
Proximity to urban center	52 Miles to Charlotte, N.C.
Proximity to interstate highway	50 Miles
Strategic approach	Entrepreneurship Partnership development
Time frame	1998-2007

The Town of Wadesboro partnered with the South Piedmont Community College (SPCC) to develop a business incubator and a public meeting space in an abandoned mill building. In 1998, the local community college purchased the West Knitting Mill building in downtown Wadesboro to house its growing continuing education program. Shortly after purchasing the mill building, the college decided to dedicate the unused portions of the building to meet other community needs, including a business incubator and a space for public meetings. The resulting Lockhart-Taylor Center is catalyzing economic development in Wadesboro by providing space for training, entrepreneurial incubation and public meeting space in a single location.

The community and its history

Wadesboro is a rural community in Anson County, just east of Charlotte. For decades, the textile industry grounded Anson County's economy. Textile's recent decline left behind vacant mill buildings and an unemployed (and largely uneducated) workforce. Wadesboro is fortunate to be the home of South Piedmont Community College (SPCC). In addition to its traditional adult education and GED programs, SPCC plays a key role in economic and workforce development.

By the mid 1990s, SPCC's continuing education program had outgrown its storefront space in downtown Wadesboro. Don Altieri, the former president of SPCC, worked with the Chamber of Commerce and the Anson County Economic Development Commission to find additional space for the college. In 1998 the college purchased the West Knitting

Wadesboro partners with a regional community college to convert an abandoned textile mill complex into an economic asset. The Lockhart-Taylor Center includes space for a business incubator, entrepreneurship training and public meetings.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Phyllis Lowe, Town of Wadesboro, April 19, 2007. Agriculture, 2006.

Mill building, a 117,500-square-foot structure, for \$50,000. Given the size of the building, the immediate question was what to do with space not needed for college programming. Two leading possibilities arose: public meeting space and a small business incubator. At the time, Altieri said, "There was no place in Anson County for a large meeting. We weren't able to bring in regional seminars or large events because of our lack of space." Further, according to Fred Sparger, a vice president at SPCC, "The larger businesses in Anson County are almost exclusively home-grown, so from a long-term economic development perspective, we need to develop new entrepreneurs."

The strategy

The town of Wadesboro partnered with SPCC to develop portions of the West Knitting Mill building for the community's economic benefit. In addition to SPCC's facilities in the mill complex, the strategy was to create space for community-use classrooms, an auditorium and a small business incubator.

To create the multi-purpose facility, SPCC needed to raise money for renovating the mill and purchasing new equipment. Led by Jimmy Hardison of the SPCC board of trustees, the college raised over \$700,000 in private donations from local residents in 18 months. Altieri and Sparger also worked with U.S. Rep. Robin Hayes to obtain \$400,000 of federal money earmarked for the project. SPCC received an additional \$1.1 million from state higher education bonds. Although costly, the project was a relative bargain. "It cost SPCC about \$51 per square foot to renovate the mill compared to \$125 per square foot to build a new facility," Sparger said.

The first phase of the renovation, initiated in 2002, focused on the Ingram Room, a 600-seat auditorium that created new opportunities for the town and college to hold large meetings and events. SPCC kept costs low by using prison labor to paint walls and move furniture. By 2003, the auditorium was complete, and the Lockhart-Taylor Center opened. Since then, the Ingram Room has drawn a significant number of conferences and guests to town, averaging about 1,000 conference attendees each month.

After completing the public auditorium, the small business incubator became a priority. In 2003 Altieri, by then retired from SPCC, worked with Wadesboro Town Manager John Witherspoon to apply for a \$400,000 grant from the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center to create New Ventures Business Development Inc., a business incubator. Witherspoon and the Town of Wadesboro received a \$400,000 Community Development Block Grant later in 2005 that went toward renovating 8,000 square feet of the Lockhart-Taylor Center for New Ventures. The incubator opened in 2007 and provides low cost space and business services to new entrepreneurs.

What are the lessons from this story?

Community colleges can be catalysts for economic revitalization. Supporting economic development is a central component of the mission of most community colleges in North Carolina, just as it is at South Piedmont. As partners or even leaders in local and regional economic development, these colleges can provide resources, infrastructure and knowledge base often lacking in small towns.

Rural residents are often an untapped source of financial capital. The per capita income for Anson County is \$14,853, nearly \$7,000 less than the national average. Yet SPCC raised more than \$700,000 from local contributors for the renovation of the West Knitting Mill. The lesson here is that small, rural communities should not be leery of looking to local residents as significant contributors to community projects. Moreover, by involving the community in the mill renovation process, SPCC fostered a sense of ownership of the building -- and its economic development outcomes -- by local residents. "Thousands of Anson County folks worked at this mill," Sparger said. "Renovating it was about more than making it look nice. We were tying it back to the history and culture of our community."

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