

FALL 2022

# DEVELOPMENTS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEWS FROM NC PUBLIC POWER



Joe Parker (right) welcomes visitors to JP's Pastry, his thriving gluten-free bakery in downtown Benson, North Carolina.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

### Powering a Flourishing Food Industry in NC

When it comes to the food-processing industry, "Everything is up," said Ben Simpson, Membership Director at the American Bakers Association (ABA), a bakery-specific national and state trade association.

"We've got demand through the roof, but the cost of ingredients, costs of production (including electricity and natural gas), and labor issues are also way up," he said. "It's a very challenging operational environment."

Even with the industry's challenges, North Carolina remains a top spot for food-processing businesses—bakers included.

Along with being ranked the top state for business by CNBC and having the top business climate according to Business Facilities, North Carolina boasts several advantages for businesses, including:

- Lowest corporate tax rate at 2.5%.
- Industrial electricity rates below the national average.
- Building costs below the national average.
- Largest manufacturing workforce in the Southeast, backed by a network of universities and community colleges that support customized training.

(Continued on Page 2)

### A NOTE from Carl

Change is constant in public power *and* in economic development, which is what gets me excited for work every day. With the recent retirement of Brenda Daniels, and after seven years at ElectricCities, I am honored to assume leadership of our economic development team. We have assembled a talented and experienced group of economic developers and are ready to support economic growth initiatives across North Carolina. Joining Jennings Gray and me are two new faces: Kellianne Davis and Casey Verburg. To provide the best possible support, Jennings and Casey are located in Huntersville, North Carolina, while Kellianne and I are based in the Raleigh office. [Visit our website to get to know our team.](#)



**Carl Rees, CECD**  
Manager, Economic and Community Development

❖ **ELECTRICITIES of NC**

**CLICK HERE**

To see a list of  
**OUR MEMBERS**





# SOCIAL MEDIA

# Highlights

Follow our social media channels to keep up with all the ways ElectriCities' economic development team promotes our member communities and the value of public power across the state and the country.



## STAY CONNECTED



*Representing ElectriCities members at the International Baking Industry Exposition in Vegas*



*Ribbon cutting for the new Rocky Mount Smart Site!*

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

(Continued from Page 1)

North Carolina's public power communities—those that own and operate their electric systems—are particularly well suited to meet food-processing industry requirements.

For manufacturers, even the slightest downtime can mean huge losses, so it matters that North Carolina public power providers keep the power on 99.98% of the time.

But food manufacturing isn't typical manufacturing, explained Ron Fish, Assistant Director for Agribusiness Development in the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Marketing.

Along with electricity and natural gas, water is critically important for food manufacturers. "That's why we have an advantage over the West Coast," Fish said. "We're seeing major opportunities in the rural areas because of the availability of natural water."

Bringing a food manufacturer into a community requires a lot of players to work together. Having electric, gas, and water services all under one roof—

as is the case in many public power communities—simplifies the process.

Joe Parker, owner of JP's Pastry, a gluten-free bakery located in the public power town of Benson, North Carolina, has developed a close partnership with the Town.

His is the only business on his block with products requiring refrigerators and freezers to stay viable. On some occasions, like when a bird flew into a transformer over the July 4th holiday, he has alerted the Town of an outage when his freezer's power sensor pinged his phone. Customers having that direct line to and personal service from their energy provider is typical of public power.

Rasma Zvaners, ABA's Vice President of Regulatory and Technical Services, said the pandemic drove some of the through-the-roof demand for baked goods Simpson mentioned. But even before the pandemic, artisan and niche products were on the rise.

Brenna Favara agrees. She's a marketing specialist with the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services who

works with the [Got to Be NC program](#) and the [North Carolina Specialty Foods Association](#). She gets applications daily for Got to Be NC—usually from smaller companies that make craft-type products—and said the specialty foods group has more than tripled its membership in the past year.

That wouldn't surprise Parker. "We've been here eight years, and it's become a destination," he said. "People walk in here and start crying because they find food they can eat."

"These consumer trends have caught the attention of a lot of international companies," said ABA's Ben Simpson. "We've talked to a lot of companies that don't have a production presence in the U.S. and are starting to build a sales and distribution footprint for their more French bread brioche-level products. Those sales are really strong."

When those companies come looking for a new home in the U.S., North Carolina will be ready with the perfect recipe of reliable public power, available workforce, and ready sites. ♦



# Good TO KNOW

## Chris Johnson, Director Johnston County Economic Development

**My favorite movies are:** “Gladiator,” “Tombstone,” “American Beauty,” “Saving Private Ryan,” and “Young Frankenstein.”

**The three things I can’t live without are:**  
My bicycle, my cell phone, my family.

**When I welcome a visitor to my town, I always take them to:** Being the Economic Developer for the county, I have 11 municipalities to choose from, all with wonderful attributes. I’d start in Smithfield at the Ava Gardner Museum, then lunch at one of the dozen BBQ joints here in the county, and then take a helicopter tour around JoCo from the Johnston Regional Airport while snacking on red hotdogs.

**The most memorable place I’ve visited is:** Barcelona, Spain, hands down. I’ve had the opportunity to visit this city several times due to the headquarters of Grifols Therapeutics, Johnston County’s largest private employer, being located there. The city is absolutely amazing. Located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, the food, culture, history, architecture, and the La Rambla shopping district will always be my favorite travel destination.

**Finish the sentence: North Carolina is ...** First in flight ... first in business. ♦



## FEATURED SITE AND BUILDING

To see a full list of sites, visit: <https://www.electricities.com/econdev>



### FARMVILLE NORTH SMART SITE

Heavy Utilities Site on I-587  
Farmville, N.C.

Available Acreage: 30 shovel-ready acres  
Sale Price: \$29,000/acre



### SHELBY SHELL BUILDING

Industrial Shell Building in Charlotte Metro  
Shelby, N.C.

108,500 sq. ft. expandable; 28-foot clear height  
Sale Price: Available on request



# Commercial DEVELOPMENTS



Expanding their successful stand-alone restaurant in Rocky Mount, the owners of Barley and Burger bring their gourmet creations to visitors of the Old North State Food Hall in Selma.

## Food Halls Are Instant Crowd Pleasers

*There's a lot to like about a food hall.*

If you're hungry, options for quick, high-quality, often unique meal and snack choices abound. If you're with other hungry people, odds are you'll all be able to find something you like at a food hall.

What's more, as ElectriCities Lead Economic Developer Jennings Gray explains, with Wi-Fi and common areas, "Food halls can become a de facto meetup and coworking space."

If you're an entrepreneurial food vendor, Gray says, "Food halls provide a chance to transition from a food truck to a brick-and-mortar store without the cost of locating a building and upgrading and up fitting." Instead, vendors enjoy turnkey setup and the benefit of the traffic that's already being generated.

That turnkey setup was certainly part of the draw for Travis Ellis and his partners when they expanded their successful Rocky Mount-based stand-alone restaurant, [Barley and Burger](#), into the [Old North State Food Hall](#). The new food hall is the first for the public power town of Selma, the first

in Johnston County, and with its location just off Interstate 95, it's the country's only interstate-adjacent food hall.

"We love the food hall concept," Ellis said. "We all have kids, so the idea of having a place where eight, 10, or 15 different concepts can all come together seemed like a really neat idea. It was also a great way to spread our love for cuisine."

Ellis and team also enjoy the comradery of the other food vendors, from friendly competitions to bouncing business ideas off each other. "It's almost like you're a family in a community all under one roof, but you're independently owned and operated."

Gray says food halls reverse the food court concept. Food courts—those clustered food vendors in malls—are designed to keep people in the mall where retailers are. Food halls, on the other hand, attract retailers, enabling diners to shop before or after their meal. "So, it's the meal, not the retail, that's driving the traffic," Gray says.

That makes sense to Kevin Dougherty, president and owner of AdVenture Development, the developer behind Old North State Food Hall. Turns out, Old North State is just the start of a much larger development called [Eastfield](#). It will include over 3 million square feet of mixed-use space, including retail, medical, residential, and much more.

"The food hall is an important starting point," Dougherty said. "Our residential piece is what we call an agrihood." It has a working farm in the middle, honoring Johnston County's agricultural roots and enabling food hall chefs to source fresh fruits and vegetables."

Over a month after opening at Old North State, Barley and Burger's Ellis said it's going great and is getting a lot of traction from locals. "I think the interstate is just going to take time."

Meet you at I-95 Exit 97! ♦

*Developments is a publication of ElectriCities' Corporate Communications team in coordination with ElectriCities' Economic Development team.*

For information on ElectriCities and economic development, contact Carl Rees at 800-768-7697 ext. 6315 or [crees@electricities.org](mailto:crees@electricities.org). Was this forwarded to you? [Sign up to receive your own copy of Developments.](#)