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Manufacturing Solutions Center gets high praise at groundbreaking

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Employees with the Manufacturing Solutions Center help break ground Tuesday at the groundbreaking ceremony for the center in Conover.



By: [SHARON MCBRAYER](#) | Hickory Daily Record
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CONOVER -- Manufacturing Solutions Center and city of Conover officials got a little closer to realizing the dream of building a new center that will be a showcase for manufacturing across the country.

The new center also will more than double its space, going from 8,000 square feet to 20,000 square feet.

On Tuesday, a bipartisan group of national, state and local officials, including US Sen. Kay Hagan (D-NC), US Rep. Patrick McHenry, (R-10th) and NC Secretary of Commerce Keith Crisco, turned out for a ceremony and groundbreaking for the center on the Conover Station site. The ceremony was in the multimodal center at Conover Station, which was dedicated in October.

McHenry told the crowd gathered for the ceremony that when people say manufacturing in the country is dead, they're wrong. He said Manufacturing Solutions Center is an innovation hub and Dan St. Louis, director of the center, has, with his vision and technical expertise, been a gift to the region.

The center also has been a lifesaver for many manufacturing companies.

Fran Davis, owner of Twin City Knitting, talked about how the center not only has helped with problems his business has had but about the customers it has brought to his company. Those new customers translated into more jobs, he said.

Some of the innovative ideas the center brought to Davis' company included compression sleeves for injured horses and product made from unusual material.

Twin City Knitting celebrated its 50th year in business in 2011, Davis said.

"We are here," Davis said about manufacturing. "We are alive."

Shane Cooper, founder and president of DeFeet, which is a private manufacturer in running, cycling and skiing socks, said the center has brought jobs to his company. The center comes in handy when DeFeet, which employs 35 workers and is located in Hildebran, needs material performance tests done quickly.

The center also has trained employees that DeFeet has hired, Cooper said.

While St. Louis was who folks talked about on Tuesday during their speeches, he was quick to deflect any praise, saying the 18 full-time staff members at the center are the ones to deserve it.

"They're the ones who make it happen," St. Louis said.

St. Louis said the center has helped out businesses in 46 states and from other countries.

Conover Mayor Lee Moritz told the crowd that any job created in the US with the help of Manufacturing Solutions Center "is a job for America."

St. Louis said a company in Iowa that creates jobs because of the help the center offered could end up buying its packaging from a company in this area.

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