Food Maker Boosts N.C. Community With 500 New Jobs

HALIFAX, N.C. (AP) — A national producer of prepared foods is expanding a North Carolina plant and plans to create 500 jobs, providing a boost to an Interstate 95 corridor that has for years struggled to lower its jobless rate.

Reser's Fine Foods Inc. will create the jobs over the next five years at the Halifax Industrial Center in Halifax County. The Beaverton, Ore.-based company makes prepared salads, dips, side dishes and other products under a variety of brand names.

Halifax County's unemployment rate was 13.6 percent in November, well above the state rate of 10.7 percent, and it's part of a corridor near the Virginia border that has consistently seen higher jobless rates than neighboring counties. Democratic State Sen. Ed Jones, who represents the region, said in a statement the announcement could not come at a better time.

"We are all going through tough times and the people of Halifax County and northeastern North Carolina need to know that we are working aggressively to expand existing businesses and attract new ones," he said.

State officials are providing a $1 million grant as part of the expansion. The first phase of the expansion starting in 2010 will include a $15 million investment from the company.

"We are convinced North Carolina is the best strategic location, and we are excited to expand there," said CEO Al Reser in a statement. "We plan to build a facility that the people of Halifax County and our employees are proud of, and one that will continue to produce great products."

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