

The DAILY COURIER

James R. Brown/ publisher
Steven E. Parham/ executive editor
Michael E. Gavin/ managing editor

601 Oak Street, P.O. Box 1149,
Forest City, N.C. 28043
Phone: 245-6431 Fax: 248-2790
E-mail address: dailycourier@blueridge.net

Our Views 3/7/06

NCCET will be boon for region

Rutherford County and the surrounding area got good news last week with Future Forward's announcement that a building in Hickory has been secured to house the North Carolina Center for Engineering Technologies.

The center will provide workforce training with specialized technical training and degree programs in engineering, applied science and technologies and management education.

"The North Carolina Center for Engineering Technologies will also provide product development, business process improvement and manufacturing competitiveness assistance; serve as a manufacturing/industrial incubator; impart intellectual property transfer know-how; and support regional economic development activities," said Future Forward chairman Ann Smith.

A private campaign raised \$1.7 million to buy the building from Corning at a greatly reduced price.

Future Forward — a group formed several years ago to come up with a vision for the region's economic future — conceived and led the effort.

Western Carolina University is expected to provide the staffing and know-how for the initial program at the center, which, once up and running, will be transferred to the University of North Carolina system next July.

This plan is exciting for many reasons, chief among them is meeting the need for some sort of formal advanced engineering training west of Charlotte.

Many authorities believe, with a lot of statistics to back them up, a crisis is on the horizon for the U.S. — a shortage of workers with adequate math, science and engineering skills to compete on the global stage of technical innovation.

We've heard for years that knowledge jobs are the jobs of the future, the jobs that will put North Carolina on track to replace the jobs lost to the erosion of the domestic textile and furniture industries.

The Center for Engineering Technologies has the potential for helping prepare ourselves to meet those challenges. It can only be of help to our economic development officials as they court businesses to come to the region and an impetus for growth for our existing industries, which now have advanced technical training services available locally.

The Center brings another success to Future Forward, a group of citizens, business owners and leaders dedicated to making the region more economically viable tomorrow and not waiting around for the government to do it for them.