

Carteret County
NEWS-TIMES

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Shared vision

North Carolina's shift away from a manufacturing- and agricultural-based economy during the past two decades hasn't come without pain, but the state's growing technology sector will provide a more solid footing for the years ahead — as long as education remains a top priority.

Carteret County, which historically lagged well behind much of the state in manufacturing and farm jobs, has long been home to a small but expanding scientific community that remains a fertile bed for economic growth. There's also a proud tradition here of making one's living on the

The ribbon-cutting ceremony held earlier this week for Geodynamics, a husband- and wife-led firm with six employees that specializes in sea floor mapping and hydrographic surveying, illustrates how neatly the two pieces — marine and science — fit together. The firm is a convincing example of the high-tech potential that exists here.

Rep. Walter B. Jones Jr., R-N.C., joined county and city officials and others on Tuesday to celebrate the firm's opening at the mostly fallow, county-owned industrial park in Morehead City.

As reported on Wednesday in the Business Pulse section of this newspaper, Chris and Sloan Freeman of Pine Knoll Shores launched the firm in 2003. The company now occupies half of a new 10,000-square-foot, two-story structure that represents a sizable investment in the community influenced by the complement of laboratories and marine resources already here.

"Our business model is doing research — academic-quality work — in the private sector," Mr. Freeman said on Thursday.

Carteret County is home to an array of academic research facilities, including the UNC Institute of Marine Sciences, the N.C. State Center for Marine Sciences and Technology and the Duke University Marine Lab. Along with the federal Center for Coastal Fisheries and Habitat Research Beaufort Laboratory, which is home to two offices of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Ocean Service and the National

Marine Fisheries Service, the scientific community's value cannot be overstated. NOAA touts its site as "uniquely suited" to the fulfillment of the administration's missions.

Much of Geodynamics' work is for NOAA and other federal agencies, but so far, mostly in other states.

Mr. Freeman said the established marine science community here is a resource that allows experts to "bounce ideas off each other." Although the couple had considered moving their operation to Wilmington, Mr. Freeman said the resources here were too valuable to leave behind.

The people here were also a family long engaged in the commercial fishing industry, Mr. Freeman said that lifestyle is integral to Geodynamics' work.

"I see marine science as a way for young people to be involved in working on the water but with a higher paying job," he said.

That's only possible through higher learning. Maintaining and developing science education is the only hope for rural coastal communities to succeed.

The incentives are here. Calling the operation a "boutique firm," Mr. Freeman said it is common for Geodynamics to work closely on projects with other companies that also offer highly specialized skills. He is looking for a similar, complementary firm to move in as a long-term tenant in the new building's remaining space.

Meanwhile, Geodynamics is also looking to expand its own operation with another possible \$1 million investment in the near future.

"We see a lot of big things on the horizon," Mr. Freeman said, but the availability of skilled labor is key.

Rep. Jones said the high-tech firm is the kind of business needed to fill the void left by the country's loss of manufacturing jobs. He praised the Freemans' vision.

"Their dream is changing the direction America is going," he said. "Being here today, I see the future."

We too praise their vision and welcome others who share it. It is our hope those making decisions on education funding also share that vision.

Complex coastal change made clear

Morehead City, N.C.
May 18, 2011

TO THE EDITOR:

I was inspired Tuesday, during the ribbon cutting ceremony for Geodynamics LLC, which just moved into its new workshop and research facility in the Crystal Coast Business Park. Geodynamics is a hydrographic and coastal geology consulting company founded and based in Morehead City and serves the coastal managers of East Coast municipalities, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and several U.S. government agencies. Coastal management needs like charting inlets for safe navigation, beach nourishment and offshore energy development off our coasts are dependent on the skills and cutting-edge technologies that have become a trademark of Geodynamics. The title of this letter is also the company's logo — Complex Coastal Change Made Clear. I'll return to this in a moment.

Chris and Sloan Freeman, president and CEO, honed their talents in the Carteret County marine science labs. Standing there among the skills and members of the Marine Science Education Partnership,

I know I speak for all of us in the marine science community when I express how proud and honored we are to call them colleagues, research partners and most of all friends. They are passionate about their work, have inspired us to do more, and clearly have an important place

in the Crystal Coast community.

Morehead City Mayor Jerry Jones, EDC Director Myles Stempin and Congressman Walter B. Jones gave moving remarks, praising Geodynamics for leading a new wave of economic prosperity and growth in coastal North Carolina. Paraphrasing Congressman Jones' remarks: Between 1999 and 2009, we lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs in North Carolina. Businesses like Geodynamics are the future for growth and prosperity in coastal North Carolina. It is clear that Chris and Sloan are achieving (and helping others achieve) the American dream.

The event also caused me to consider our current economic predicament in North Carolina. Chris and Sloan forged a difficult road, building this company from scratch and experiencing every difficulty of a small but growing business — from borrowing money for equipment and building, to hiring capable staff. While they are incredible people (near superhuman in most regards), they couldn't have done it alone. They have assembled an accomplished staff, and many they have drawn from the community colleges and universities in coastal North Carolina.

Companies like Geodynamics will only succeed if they have an educated workforce from which to draw. And any new businesses that will meet the needs of a growing coastal community are only going

to come to coastal North Carolina if they see the same potential that Chris and Sloan saw 10 years ago.

Where will their workforce come from tomorrow? We are at the crossroads of deciding how funds within our state's budget will be allocated. When the legislature and county commission consider drastic cuts to our county school system, downgrading curricula in science, math and engineering in our public schools, significantly raising tuition at our coastal colleges and even eliminating directed training programs in Marine Technologies at our coastal community colleges, they may be sealing the fate of any further growth in small businesses like Geodynamics that are meeting the immediate needs of a growing and prospering coastal community!

I respect the difficult decisions that our legislators and county commissioners have to make in North Carolina. Facilitating coastal economic change is complex, but I hope the decision will be made clear.

Please consider budget priorities that will ensure success in education and economic growth on our coasts. Continue to help Geodynamics and Carteret County meet the needs of our coastal communities.

CHRIS TAYLOR, Ph.D.
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NOAA/National Ocean Service
National Centers for Coastal
Ocean Science
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Habitat Research, Pivers Island
(Copies of this letter have also
been forwarded to Representatives
McElraft, Hamilton, Justice and
McComas as well as Senators Preston
and Goolsby and House Speaker
Tillis.)