

Haywood Community College was awarded a competitive grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission of \$100,000 for equipment to support an Advanced Manufacturing Incubator (AMI). Through Project AMI, aspiring entrepreneurs, who do not have the capital needed to open their own shop, will be able to rent time at AMI to develop and produce their product for the market. When these products begin to earn a profit, these aspiring entrepreneurs will be able to invest in the development of their own business with the assistance of the resources provided through the HCC Small Business Center.

The Small Business Center was relocated in 2016 to 144 Industrial Park Drive, when the College assumed ownership of that building from the Smoky Mountain Development Corporation (SMDC) in April 2016. Throughout its history, this facility has always been used for workforce development, job creation and job training. Currently, the facility houses tenants whose leases expire at the end of September 2018. With Project AMI, HCC will shift the current focus of long-term tenancy to three to five year terms for incubator tenant occupancy, as was the original intent.

To determine the most viable and beneficial use of the facility, HCC recently commissioned an external feasibility study. Under the direction of an education and economic development consultant affiliated with the Wake Forest University School of Law, local and regional economic development data were analyzed and paired with careful examination of existing resources at HCC. The results showed that manufacturing and access to 'maker space' is a crucial need for the development of new and existing business that directly supports the economic development of Haywood County and the surrounding region.

As a result of the study, HCC will dedicate a portion of the building to Project AMI. Evaluation continues as to what is the best use of the remaining space.

In addition, the College's Small Business Center will remain in the building as a key partner with businesses that will utilize AMI as well as new and existing businesses in the county.

HCC produces a significant number of graduates in high-skill, high-demand fields; however, most need to leave Haywood County for employment that will sustain their family. Project AMI is designed so that Haywood County's greatest resource, its people, has the ability to start businesses in Haywood County.

The incubator will provide space and equipment comparable to the equipment used to train students at the College. The benefit is that aspiring entrepreneurs can build their businesses without the high startup cost of purchasing facilities and equipment. This concept is commonly referred to as 'maker space.'

Project AMI will complement the College's mission to support workforce training in Haywood County while seizing the unique opportunity to utilize the space within the Industrial Park as a collaborative effort with the programs housed at the Regional High Technology Center (directly beside the facility). This initiative also continues the tradition of workforce development, job creation and job training to make a stronger community for the county and the surrounding region.

For more information about HCC's Advanced Manufacturing Incubator, please call 828-627-4521.

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