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Article published Feb 3, 2007

## Cordeau: Spartanburg must recruit young workers

**MONICA MERCER, Staff Writer**

There's a "cool metro" phenomenon spreading across the country, dictating where the young, educated and vibrant want to live, but apparently Spartanburg isn't leading the pack.

David Cordeau, president and CEO of the Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce, doled out sobering opinions like this, with statistics to back him up, to kick-start Spartanburg County Council's annual retreat on Friday.

"We have to make a quantum shift in our economic development efforts toward recruiting people," Cordeau said.

That philosophy is imperative, he continued, because of a major shift in how companies must now choose their home bases; people are moving to places where they want to live, and companies have no choice but to follow.

Cordeau said projections show the United States will face a considerable shortage of workers in the near future. It's his belief that when that happens, the 361 metro areas in America will need every bit of clout they can muster as competition for people and the coveted "cool factor" gets fierce.

In other words, Cordeau suggested, start pushing "the spirit, the style, the ambience" of living in Spartanburg -- and start making public relations the No. 1 priority.

"Just having a bunch of disconnected, incomplete Web sites won't get the job done," he said.

"I think he's dead-on with that," said Councilman Tom Foster. "We just haven't done a good job of selling ourselves, and it's something everyone in the community is going to have to work on."

But it will also take a radical shift in the way area leaders, like those at the Spartanburg Economic Development Corporation, view the local economy itself.

According to a recent report on U.S. metro economies put out by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Spartanburg is the 166th largest of the 361 metro areas in the country. Yet its gross metro product (GMP) is 171st, and it ranks 263rd in GMP growth in 2006. It ranks 302nd in employment growth over the past five years.

In fact, Spartanburg has no more jobs now than it did 10 years ago, despite big boons for the region like the continuing presence of BMW and new arrivals like EchoStar.

Unfortunately, Cordeau insisted, this is because of the area's "extraordinarily heavy reliance" on manufacturing despite the fact that the manufacturing sector continues to lose jobs at a higher rate than any other. Currently, 23.1 percent of Spartanburg employment is in manufacturing, compared with 10.3 percent for the average metro area. And trends indicate that 95 percent of the new jobs in the next 10 years will be in service-related industries.

"We absolutely need to diversify our economy," he said, to attract the educated people who are capable of filling those service jobs.

Angela Viney, who directs Upstate Forever's Spartanburg office, commented that Cordeau's presentation, which was followed by daylong discussions on planning and capital improvements for the county, provides the framework for pondering and changing Spartanburg's course.

"These are the issues we're facing, the challenges we're going to have to overcome so that 10, 20 years from now we will be a vibrant city."

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