

**Serving Displaced Workers:
Lessons Learned and Recommendations to Other Colleges**

**How Rowan-Cabarrus Community College Served Displaced Workers
Through the Pillowtex Project**

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THE CENTER FOR
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Introduction

The manufacturing industry in America is in peril. Jobs are disappearing quickly as industries move overseas or downsize due to decreases in sales or increases in production technology that modernize plants and alter employment needs. According to the 2008 Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Population Survey, in 2008 there were approximately 15,904,000 jobs in manufacturing in the United States. Those jobs included everything from producing computers to automobiles and paper pulp. From 2003, one million of these jobs were lost, producing a six percent decline over five years. The 2007 Bureau of Labor Statistics' Industries at a Glance showed that by April 2009, there were approximately 12,152,000 individuals still employed in manufacturing, indicating a decline of 3,750,000 jobs—24 percent—in one year. Within the manufacturing industry, approximately 70 percent of workers are male; 30 percent of the workers are minority.

Within the broader manufacturing industry exists a fledgling textiles, apparel, and leather industry that have suffered greater job losses than manufacturing as a whole. Textiles, apparel, and leather plants and mills employed approximately 700,000 people nationwide in 2008, a decline of approximately 331,000 jobs, 32 percent, over five years. Approximately 44 percent of workers in the textiles, apparel, and leather industry are male; 46 percent of the workers are minority.

Within the state of North Carolina, the textiles, apparel, and leather industry has been a major source of jobs for over 100 years. In January 1999, there were approximately 800,000 jobs in this industry in the state. By January 2009, approximately jobs 250,000 remained, a 69 percent decline.

The Pillowtex Corporation was one of the three largest producers of bedding and bath textiles in the United States. It was the leading manufacturer of what is known in the industry as "top-of-the-bed" products, including blankets, pillows, mattress pads, and comforters. Through its subsidiary, Fieldcrest Cannon Inc., Pillowtex was also the leading U.S. manufacturer of towels, and sold many other well-known home textile brands, including Royal Velvet, Cannon, and Charisma. The company offered more than 10,000 products that were manufactured in plants throughout the United States and Canada. The company grew rapidly through acquisitions, culminating in the merger in 1997 with Fieldcrest Cannon, a firm even larger than itself.

In September 1997, Pillowtex announced that it had agreed to acquire the whole of Fieldcrest Cannon, a Kannapolis, North Carolina-based company that was the first name in bed and bath products. Fieldcrest was to be run as a subsidiary of Pillowtex in North Carolina. The combined company had sales of \$1.6 billion and 15,000 employees nationwide, making it the second or third largest home textile manufacturer in the United States.

However, Pillowtex inherited in this merger a long-running labor dispute at the towel-maker's North Carolina factories. After a struggle dating back to the 1970s, the Union of Needle Trades, Textile, and Industrial Employees finally won the right to organize Fieldcrest's six plants in Kannapolis in 1999. The Kannapolis workers had been paid about \$2 an hour less than workers

at Pillowtex's other unionized plants. The company and the workers appeared destined for greatness.

By the second quarter of 2000, approximately three years after the acquisition of Fieldcrest Cannon, Pillowtex had lost more than \$8 million. At the same time, interest rates were rising and the company's total debt had risen to more than \$1 billion. In July 2003, the Kannapolis Pillowtex factory filed for bankruptcy and permanently closed its operations nationwide. Overall, North Carolina lost 4,790 jobs while Rowan and Cabarrus counties accounted for 3,984 of those lost jobs.

Of the people who lost jobs in Rowan and Cabarrus counties, 45 percent lacked a high school credential. Additionally, the new service industry jobs that were available could not come close to matching the wages of their recently lost manufacturing jobs. Consequently, there was a significant loss of both personal income and local tax revenues. Many families were in crisis; in many situations, more than one family member lost a job at Pillowtex. Home foreclosures and bankruptcies were imminent. Managing the tremendous loss of personal income and regional revenue while restoring the community to economic viability presented serious challenges for Rowan and Cabarrus counties, hence the Pillowtex Project.

This paper will explain the rapid response of Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, the emergency funding they received, the role of community partners, lessons learned over the five-year period since the closing of Pillowtex, and recommendations to other community colleges that find themselves in the situation of serving displaced workers.

The Pillowtex Project

At the announcement of an impending plant closing or lay-off, the state's Rapid Response team responds quickly. Funded through resources from the U.S. Department of Labor, the Rapid Response teams move to coordinate services and provide aid to companies and their affected workers. In this case, the local Job Link Rapid Response staff set up offices in vacated Pillowtex Plant #4, which became the official extension of the local Job Link Career Centers. This supplemental center was devoted exclusively to taking claims, providing information, and making referrals to support services to former Pillowtex workers and ancillary workers losing jobs from companies related to Pillowtex. This site remained open for over 18 months.

The magnitude of the Pillowtex dislocation called for the mobilization of the entire community. Community agencies such as the United Way, local churches, crisis ministry groups, healthcare providers, Salvation Army, and others set up a center within two blocks of the Job Link satellite located in Plant #4. Emergency services such as stress and change management workshops were offered. Other services included GED preparation, job-seeking skills workshops, motivational workshops, ESL education, and clothing closets to assist the dislocated workers in obtaining new employment.

A key partner in the Pillowtex Project was Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC). From the beginning, the college stepped in to assist the Job Link staff in planning and implementing

its rapid response. It was clear that education and training would be a critical component of this recovery effort. College staff worked full-time at the Job Link satellite location, providing college admission information, conducting workshops, administering interest inventories and college placement tests, and offering counseling and referrals to other services.

In the 2005 program year, the North Carolina Community College System applied for and received over \$6.6 million in National Emergency Grant (NEG) assistance from the U. S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration. Rowan-Cabarrus Community College received \$2.3 million for capacity-building initiatives such as hiring additional instructors and staff, renovating and leasing space, and purchasing equipment and supplies. The college was able to increase capacity and/or add new training and degree programs such as Air Conditioning and Heating Technologies and Construction and Management Technologies as well as open a Business and Technology Center and offer entrepreneurial training.

At the end of the first quarter of the 2005 calendar year, RCCC had enrolled 47 percent of the NEG-eligible clients living in the two-county area into its courses and programs. In addition, the college had provided direct employment services such as placement testing along with other support services such as cosmetology services and resume writing to over 80 percent of the affected population. More than 231 individuals—43.3 percent of the 534 enrolled clients—had received their GED; approximately 125 had become certified nurse's aides; and nearly 400 had enrolled in human resources development programs and short-term occupational extension training programs such as Pharmacy Technician, Medical Coding and Billing, Medical Unit Secretary, Adult Basic Education, Construction Management Technologies, Air Conditioning and Heating, and Entrepreneurial Training. At the beginning of the 2005 school year, the college had over 600 displaced Pillowtex persons enrolled in traditional or technical programs throughout the college. In May of 2005, the first group of college students was expected to graduate.

During the first year of the emergency funding, RCCC contracted with the Center for Applied Research (CFAR) at Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) to fulfill the research and accountability requirements of the grant.

The Research and Assessment

As part of the accountability plan for serving workers who were displaced from their jobs at Pillowtex, an analysis was conducted of workers' responses to the services they received at RCCC. The college was also interested in the perceptions and observations of faculty and staff who worked with displaced Pillowtex workers. Center staff conducted a total of nine focus groups—six focus groups with displaced Pillowtex workers and one group each with RCCC faculty, RCCC staff, and Service Center employees. These focus groups were conducted in the first program year and served as information to guide program delivery and decision-making in year two.

The RCCC staff and Service Center employees were asked the following questions:

1. How would you describe your experience(s) in working with Pillowtex workers?

2. Do you think that Pillowtex students have added or detracted from the overall quality of the student experience at RCCC?
3. Based on your experience, what would you say the college should do differently in working with adult displaced workers?
4. What advice would you give your fellow staff members in regards to facilitating the transition of displaced workers back to school?
5. Overall, how would you rate the college's success in working with this nontraditional segment of the student body?

The questions asked of faculty were as follows:

1. How would you describe our Pillowtex students in terms of their strengths and weaknesses?
2. Is the college doing a good job in processing Pillowtex students before they enter your classroom?
3. What advice would you give an instructor who had not yet had the experience of teaching displaced workers?
4. Is RCCC the appropriate training agency to be the primary provider of training for Rowan/Cabarrus displaced workers? Why or why not?
5. What, if anything, have you learned from working with Pillowtex workers that has made you a better teacher?
6. Are there additional resources that you or your students need to meet the unique demands of this clientele?

The former Pillowtex worker students were asked seven to nine questions depending on the size and makeup of the group and their level of volubility. The core questions were:

1. Why did you decide to enroll at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC)?
2. How would you describe your experience at RCCC so far?
3. How would you describe your experience with instructors and staff?
4. What are some ways RCCC could improve its services to displaced workers like Pillowtex?
5. Would you recommend RCCC to a friend? Why or why not?
6. How would you describe RCCC in one sentence?
7. Do you plan to pursue a career/job that is related to the training you are receiving from the college?
8. Is there anything you wish you had known at the beginning that you found out along the way?
9. You have said the last year has been hard. Please explain what you mean by the adjustment.

Student groups were also asked if they had other comments that were not covered in the focus group questions. Some groups had additional comments and others did not. The size of the student groups ranged from five to eleven participants.

The overarching theme of all the focus group discussions was that RCCC was put in the position of taking on a monumental task with a 14 percent increase in enrollment for the fall 2003 semester, in addition to a 35 to 50 percent increase in demand for basic skills and short-term occupational training programs (Press Releases, 2003). Though there had been many rumors about the mill closings throughout early 2003, as one participant in the staff focus group said, "The Pillowtex layoffs happened quickly with no advance warning."

As late as July 2003, there were discussions about plant buy-outs and loan extensions. Though the state and local governments had begun preparation regarding the possible layoff of 6,000 employees, no one really seemed to believe the plants would close completely. When Pillowtex Corp. ceased operations in late July, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College prepared to assist the workers by providing necessary occupational assessment, counseling, and training (Press Releases, 2003). Many of the students participating in the focus groups felt that RCCC faculty and staff had gone above and beyond to help them make the transition from a work environment to an academic environment.

A second important issue discussed in the focus groups was the diverse levels of preparedness of the displaced Pillowtex workers. The college had developed a tentative plan of response based upon very limited demographic information provided by the Pillowtex human resources department. Some clients needed large amounts of special assistance (both physical and psychological) and were at very low literacy levels, while others had some college experience and were at high performance levels. Many of these workers had been employed in textile mills for 30 years or more and had not completed high school. The students who had completed high school had often not attended school in 25 to 40 years, which posed specific challenges for older students who had to learn how to think academically again. Most of the mill workers in this cohort had not had positive previous educational experiences and were frightened about going back to school. They claimed to often feel inadequate when they actually lacked confidence. Faculty, staff, and students alike said that the displaced Pillowtex workers did not know what they were getting into when they returned to school.

In addition to their lack of preparedness for studies, the workers were also unprepared in most instances for selecting a course of study. Many of them complained that they felt rushed to select a curriculum or a new career. Staff and faculty, as well as the ESC representatives, were called upon to help the displaced workers make crucial decisions about their future within a short amount of time. By July 30 when the plants closed, it was time for regular students to register for the fall 2003 semester at RCCC. The displaced workers were required to look for a job or enroll in school to receive their unemployment benefits. Those who chose to enroll at RCCC had to immediately select a course of study and/or take placement tests with virtually no preparation. The stress level was high for everyone involved in the process.

Staff and faculty also stated that the workers were suffering from the stress of becoming unemployed. As one staff member said in the focus group, "RCCC staff had to deal with another layer of responsibility with the students' personal issues before staff could do the job they were assigned to do. Many displaced workers wanted the staff to make decisions for them."

Another issue that was stressed by staff and faculty, even more than by students, was the lack of clarity regarding the parameters of financial aid monies. Because there was little upfront communication between Continuing Education and Curriculum and between the college staff and the ESC staff, students were receiving different answers from different people as to rules for funding. Staff felt that they needed more training to adequately answer students' questions and to deal with the unique problems presented by this group of students. One additional, complicating issue discovered through this process was that mill and plant workers had an effective communication network among themselves where information, both accurate and inaccurate, moved quickly.

Students discussed the challenges they had to face in making themselves go to school, getting through the registration process, deciding which direction to take in their studies, and learning how to study again. Many asked for teachers who could deal with students who had been out of school for 30 years. Summer school students expressed frustration at the fast pace of the classes and the requirement to learn so much in so short a time.

Some students felt that teachers could have been more helpful and understanding, while the majority praised the instructors for the extra help they gave. Some students felt overwhelmed by math and computer classes while others welcomed the challenge of learning new skills. However, since many of the Pillowtex workers had never had an occasion to learn typing or keyboarding, the lack of computer skills added a special challenge to the stress of preparing papers for classes. Mill and plant workers were also used to working in a noisy environment not conducive to communicating and interacting with others. Many stated that it took them a while to begin to speak up in class and to talk to other students.

Lessons Learned

There was a consensus among focus group participants that the college needed more preparation up front to handle this many new and somewhat atypical students at one time. Faculty and staff both suggested more training would have enabled them to be more helpful to the students, especially when it came to curriculum choices and funding restrictions. Most people in the focus groups, however, felt that the college staff did a good job in meeting the challenges.

Many of the students needed special help in how to study, what to expect in college, and in keyboarding. It was suggested that classes in these subjects would have been helpful, but such classes were not eligible for funding. Faculty, staff, and students felt that more individual in-depth placement testing was needed prior to enrolling the students in a curriculum.

Some displaced Pillowtex workers felt that it was difficult to be in classes with 18-year-olds, but others said that the younger students had been helpful to them. Faculty said that the Pillowtex workers set a good example for the younger students with their dedication and work ethic. Staff members also said that having the displaced workers at RCCC had made a profound

impression on the college at many levels and that, “This experience has made college personnel closer and made us better people.”

As for the students, some of their focus groups were asked, “How would you describe RCCC in one sentence”? Their answers are best summed up in the statement, “It’s a great learning experience for everyone”!

Recommendations to RCCC for the Second Year

While RCCC served the first wave of approximately 1,600 Pillowtex workers during the 2003–2004 academic year, they expected an additional group to enter during the 2004–2005 year. Because they continued to serve the original cohort and began serving a new cohort, the following recommendations were made:

- 1. Recognize that this next year is going to be equally as challenging as the first year. The original cohort of displaced workers who entered RCCC during the 2003–2004 year has made significant adjustments to an academic world. However, an additional group of displaced workers will enter the college this fall that may have greater need than the previous group simply due to the fact that they will have waited until all possible options were exhausted before entering college. This group could prove to be in need of more services and more individualized attention due to a demonstration of lower skill levels than the cohort from the previous year. The original cohort will also be making yet another adjustment—entering the job market, searching for jobs, and working in a totally new environment away from friends they have known for years. The college needs to augment its job placement programs and services to meet this anticipated need.**
- 2. Establish a formal communication channel for all faculty and staff at RCCC. In order to communicate important information quickly about funding, regulations, policies, program issues, and employment opportunities, the college needs to create an effective methodology to communicate with all full- and part-time faculty and staff.**
- 3. Work with community leaders in Rowan and Cabarrus counties to collect and refurbish old computers and give them to displaced workers for home use. Many Pillowtex workers commented on their lack of home computers. They also discovered they are at a disadvantage having to constantly come to campus to use computer labs.**
- 4. Offer support groups for displaced workers. Pillowtex workers felt support groups conducted at the college about what other students were experiencing would greatly help them. During the second year, RCCC should consider offering support groups to help with the second phase of their programs and services—completing programs and looking for jobs. The college may need to anticipate the disappointment and anxiety felt over applying for jobs. This experience will also be a new challenge for students who have been employed in the same mill for 35 years.**

- 5. Offer pre-college workshops for the incoming group of displaced workers to help new students transition to college.** Ideally, these workshops should be offered prior to starting classes. Workshops could include:
 - Adjusting to college (surviving the first year)
 - Introduction to keyboarding and computers
 - Career testing and counseling
 - College placement tests workshop or tutorial

- 6. Have a comprehensive plan for student schedules. Academic advisors and those who have input into the college schedule need to recognize the difficulties experienced during the first year of college.** Because workers must attend classes 12 months of the year to be eligible for funding, class schedules should be carefully planned and easier courses left for summer terms so students are not as overwhelmed with the condensed summer schedule.

- 7. Hold a debriefing session for faculty and staff. Before school begins in the fall, the institution should hold a debriefing session with faculty and staff to go over successes of the first year, make recommendations for improvement, and deliver information about the outcomes recognized so far in serving displaced workers.**

- 8. Coordinate curriculum and continuing education efforts for the benefit of students.** During the first year of the program, continuing education administration and staff stepped forward and took the lead in serving this population. During the focus groups, students recognized and applauded the continuing education staff at the college for the extra work and energy the staff put forth to serve the students. However, the majority of students were enrolled in curriculum programs and the focus of services and programs will shift to the curriculum arena in 2004-05 as students matriculate from GED and short-term continuing education programs. The college will serve students more effectively if the resources from both continuing education and curriculum instruction work together to pool staff and resources to better serve displaced workers.

- 9. Recognize and capitalize on the opportunity the college has to serve as a model site for effectively serving displaced workers.** Because mill and plant closings are occurring across the country, RCCC will have the opportunity to assist other colleges in establishing services and developing programs to serve displaced workers. RCCC can become a national leader in service to communities in need. The college should take advantage of opportunities to present the findings of this process, publish results, and speak to the needs of displaced workers across the country. It is for this reason that the following section is addressed.

Recommendations to Other Colleges

Faculty, staff, and students shared issues that would have made the displaced workers' transition easier if these issues had been addressed prior to, during, or after serving displaced workers. Because RCCC would be in the position to make recommendations to other colleges that find themselves in similar situations, the following specific strategies are recommended:

- 1. Establish an effective daily communication channel for all faculty and staff at the institution for critical information.** This could be in the form of a newsletter, website, or broadcast email series, but the entire institution needs to receive information quickly in regard to funding, regulations or policies, differences between curriculum and continuing education programs and regulations, etc. Serving displaced workers is different than serving traditional community college students and rapid deployment of information is often critical to keep rumors and panic at bay. Since community colleges function with large numbers of part-time instructors, it is important to recognize that these employees are often left completely out of the loop when it comes to communicating important information about programs, policies, and practices.
- 2. Create an effective intake form for displaced workers that is more extensive than a typical admissions form and contains more detailed information critical to student success.** College staff will appreciate having information on experience with technology, ability to type, learning style, previous educational experience, career intent, job experience, childcare, transportation, and housing issues.
- 3. Offer training to faculty and staff at the college on how to deal with the emotional distress felt by displaced workers.** Before college staff can address educational issues, they often have to deal with anger, grief, stress management, high anxiety, and fear. These workers will latch on to anyone who will help them, and faculty/staff need to develop effective ways to assist these individuals in the transition from work to school. Colleges may need to set up a triage type of facility to help displaced workers deal with their personal issues. They often need more handholding than typical community college students.
- 4. Make sure all financial aid and funding issues are understood by college staff prior to seeing students.** These students are often not eligible for Pell grants because qualification is based on income from the previous year (when they were employed). WIA and TRA moneys have different regulations and change often. This is a great source of frustration to students, as having to maneuver their way through the system is difficult.
- 5. Create materials about the college and its programs and services that are geared toward adult students with little or no higher education experience.** These materials should contain maps, directions, phone numbers, and lists of frequently asked questions. Definition of terms (such as semester, credit hour, prerequisite/co-requisite,

withdrawal deadline, etc.) is a major issue for adult learners with no previous higher education experience.

6. Offer workshops and additional resources for faculty on classroom strategies to work with displaced worker students who have been disconnected from education for 25 to 40 years. Some suggestions made by faculty were:

- Using role playing
- Moving from concrete to abstract thinking
- Using real-life examples in teaching
- Reteaching students who once knew but have forgotten
- Breaking difficult materials down into small pieces
- Slowing the pace of the classroom
- Encouraging students and celebrating successes
- Being flexible with assignments
- Peer teaching
- Dealing with ESL in the classroom
- Establishing study groups
- Hands-on helping
- Re-engaging thinking processes
- Creating study guides for courses and tests

7. Work with community leaders to collect and refurbish old computers and give them to displaced workers for home use. Mill and plant workers who often are not comfortable with technology may not have home computers, yet they discover they are at a disadvantage if they constantly have to come to campus to use computer labs.

8. Offer support groups to deal with the nonacademic issues that impact student success. During the focus groups, mill workers mentioned that they wish they had been able to come together in groups to discuss their fears and successes. They felt support groups conducted at the college about what others were experiencing would have been very helpful to them. They expressed satisfaction in being able to communicate their issues through the focus groups.

9. Offer precollege workshops for groups of displaced workers to help them transition to college. These workshops should be offered prior to starting classes. A nonexhaustive list could be:

- **Adjusting to college/surviving the first year**
Students who have never attended college and/or have been out of school 25 to 40 years have much to learn about college expectations. Students and faculty voiced concerns about their ability to deal with carrying heavy book bags, improving their memory, modern grading policies, time management, juggling family and school,

reading and comprehension, giving up when they don't do well, and locating and using college services.

- **Introduction to keyboarding and computers**

Many of these students had never turned on a computer and voiced great disappointment when they entered beginning computer classes. They expected to learn the basics—from how to turn on a computer, what a mouse is, what “right click” and “left click” are, etc. These students need to learn the basics of keyboarding and the basics of typing before they enter college-level courses or computer courses. Most college faculty expect students to turn in typed work. The majority of these students did not know how to type, let alone operate a computer. The college may want to create a developmental (remedial) computer class.

- **Soft skills for college students**

This course should address people skills, faculty-student communication, speaking up in class, and basic classroom etiquette. Many individuals who have worked with ear plugs in noisy plants and mills have forgotten basic written and oral communication skills.

- **Career testing and counseling**

These sessions can be conducted in groups. Students were forced to select a major quickly due to WIA and TRA regulations and then were not allowed to change their major to maintain their funding. The college should offer printed booklets from the U.S. Department of Labor about career options and deliver group career counseling if it is impossible to offer individual counseling due to numbers.

- **College placement tests workshop or tutorial**

The format of the tests and the importance of them needs to be explained so accurate placement occurs in math and English classes. Prerequisites and remedial courses need to be explained.

10. Develop a good working relationship with agencies who serve this population.

Displaced workers will force agencies to deal with needed changes in policies and rules. Sharing of critical privileged client information should be negotiated up-front by partner agencies.

11. Look at shared-hours agreements with other colleges for programs (e.g., degrees, certificates, and diplomas) that cohorts want but are not offered at your institution. One focus group participant wanted to get a certification in HVAC but the courses for certification were offered at another institution. The student needed a minimum number of hours at that institution to receive the certification but was required to take his courses at RCCC due to restrictions imposed by the trade legislation.

- 12. Have a comprehensive plan for student schedules. Academic advisors and those who** have input into the college schedule need to plan for student schedules that recognize difficulties experienced during the first year of college. Displaced workers who enter the college will have great difficulty in the fall term (their first term), will do better in spring, but will experience great difficulty again with condensed summer terms since they will receive a large amount of material in a shorter timeframe. Because workers must attend classes 12 months of the year to be eligible for funding, class schedules need to be carefully planned. Advisors should recommend that students save easier courses for summer terms so students are not overwhelmed with the condensed summer schedule. Those responsible for scheduling classes need to keep difficulty level in mind and offer a wide selection in summer terms.

- 13. Hold a debriefing session for faculty and staff periodically to learn from one another.** At the end of the first year, the institution needs to hold a debriefing session with faculty and staff to go over successes of the first year, make recommendations for improvement, and deliver information about outcomes of serving displaced workers.

What's Happened Since 2005?

Data collected from RCCC's database in late 2005 showed that about 50 percent of the former Pillowtex workers had found some level of employment. Many were working in service sector jobs, especially since the community had experienced significant retail and service industry growth. It was not unusual to find former Pillowtex workers engaged in multiple part-time jobs with limited or no benefits in order to sustain their survival. Some found employment at well-known workplaces such as Phillip Morris USA and Freightliner, which are now experiencing major job losses in the region. The disposition of approximately 1,000—25 percent—of the former textile workers is unknown; those workers are no longer reachable by mail or telephone. Because this was an older workforce, many have likely now retired and may be surviving on limited social security and retirement benefits. Some did go on to more sustainable employment opportunities in health care, advanced manufacturing, and trade-related occupations in machining, welding, automotive, and heating and air conditioning. Approximately 500 graduated from the college with a certificate, one-year diploma, or two-year degree.

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College has experienced a 17 percent growth in college enrollment, and the continuing education department has realized a 25 percent jump in enrollment since 2005. Many of the new college entrants are nontraditional students, e.g., older students, minorities, and persons of limited English-speaking ability.

The college and the workforce system continue to work together in a newly established Career Center in downtown Kannapolis to serve dislocated persons in the area. They have developed a common intake form that allows clients seamless transition between and among various services. The Center has served 3,135 customers in 8,580 visits since 2007.

A Changing Industry in Rowan and Cabarrus Counties

In December 2004, David Murdock, CEO of Dole Foods and other companies, returned to Kannapolis to purchase back the plant (Fieldcrest Cannon Mills) that he had sold to Pillowtex in the 1990s. He came back to North Carolina with the vision of building a world-class biotechnology research center focusing on nutrition and health. This transformative vision for Kannapolis is in process. The smokestacks are now gone and have been replaced by a sprawling research campus in the middle of downtown Kannapolis. While the 350-acre campus is still under development, it is currently home to its centerpiece, the David H. Murdock Core Laboratory, in addition to several North Carolina university campus research facilities. The new college career center opened there in 2007 with facility support from Murdock's real estate company, Castle & Cooke, Inc. On the North Carolina Research Campus website, Murdock is quoted as saying:

The most exciting part of this project is to be able to create sustainable, better-paying jobs for the people of Kannapolis and the region, and the creation of this scientific community centered on biotechnology will allow a transformation of this economy from a manufacturing-based one to one centered on scientific knowledge and research. Through the collaboration of the university scientists, the biotechnology research, and the state-of-the-art laboratories, new discoveries will be made that will further my goal of teaching people about proper health, nutrition, and wellness.

The transformation of Kannapolis from reliance on textile manufacturing to a world-class research center is clearly evident in the magnificent buildings and advanced research laboratories that now make up the landscape of the town. There is a constant flow of traffic and people to the North Carolina Research Campus, but the cars are newer and more energy efficient, pedestrians are taking full advantage of the expanded sidewalks and greenways, and the workers engaged in current research jobs are markedly younger, more ethnically diverse, and technically savvy. Retail shops and outlet stores have been replaced with small research offices, temporary office space for university representatives, and entrepreneurial activities connected to the NCRC's nutritional and health focus. Restaurants and small cafes provide healthy choices and sidewalk seating. The local park hosts outdoor family movies and concerts. Local citizens of all ages routinely fill the Core Laboratory events room for seminars led by world-renowned researchers and practitioners who educate the public on health, nutrition, and genetic research.

Lifelong learning and healthy living have taken on great significance in Kannapolis—a huge contrast to the harsh realities of the lifestyles and working conditions that were prevalent when textile and tobacco manufacturing reigned supreme. Kannapolis is in the midst of great transformation, but the current state of the global economy has slowed the development of new jobs. However, the ongoing planning and construction of new campus buildings, parking decks, roads, and residential development signal that job growth is imminent. The constant barrage of news in and around the community related to nutritional research and the scientific advancements made possible by the world-class research equipment and scientists now occupying the campus signal possibilities for careers in science and technology. Economic

recovery seems plausible in our part of the world, but much work remains to be done to connect local people to the future.

Overall Lessons Learned

The unemployment rate in the affected counties settled back near six percent soon after the Pillowtex closing. In 2008 and 2009, the unemployment rate in Rowan and Cabarrus counties has begun to inch up again following the loss of Phillip Morris, Freightliner, and others. The current unemployment rate is around 12 percent. However, the community and local workforce development staff learned much from the Pillowtex experience and are re-energizing around the theme, "Refocus, Retrain and Re-employ." Armed with well-learned lessons and the hope embodied in the new North Carolina Research Campus, the workforce system and its partners, particularly Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, are prepared and ready to address the employment situation at hand.

In 2005, the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration recognized Rowan-Cabarrus Community College and their partner, the Center for Applied Research at Central Piedmont Community College, as recipients of the Recognition of Excellence award for the Pillowtex Project. They count the following among the overall lessons learned:

- **Lifelong learning is valuable and necessary. As the textile mills, tobacco industries, and truck manufacturers have declined, it is evident that future jobs will evolve slowly and will be largely based on knowledge and information. Innovation, research, continuous improvement, and efficiency of people and resources are the necessary criteria for future success and job growth. The sudden loss of a job and income for a large portion of the undereducated factory workers was a wake-up call, and changing expectations in the workplace became a reality for many. The need for education and training was realized and addressed as demonstrated in the increases in persons getting their GED and enrolling in institutions of higher education.**
- **The resources and involvement of the workforce investment system, particularly National Emergency Grant Funds from the Employment and Training Administration, the State's Rapid Response Team, and the One-Stop centers are critical to a successful strategy when dealing with mass layoffs. Co-location in One-Stops at the new Career Center for dislocated workers at the North Carolina Research Campus is a plus. A common intake form also facilitates seamless delivery of critical employment and wrap-around services available through a variety of employment, educational, and social institutions.**
- **Job-seekers often need more than skills and education. Job seekers may also lack job-seeking and job-keeping skills. Interviewing techniques, professional dress, etiquette, and other social services may be needed. It is important for the long-term success of the job seeker to address all of these needs, as appropriate.**

- **With the building of the state-of-the-art biotech research center, it is important to** encourage elementary and high school students as well as others to focus more on math and science while in school.
- **The community must learn to deal better with diversity. With the changes in** Kannapolis, new residents and NCRC partners are joining the community. The campus is attracting people from all over the world. In addition to the obvious physical and ethnic diversity issues, these people bring new languages, different religious and social customs, and great diversity of thoughts and ideas. Couple that with scientific research and practice, and the learning curve for local long-term residents has been phenomenal. It impacts and challenges all of their prior experiences and beliefs. The closest comparable research entity to the Core Lab in Kannapolis is in Singapore.

The Future

The future appears bright for Rowan and Cabarrus counties of North Carolina. Even though the unemployment rate in the area is higher than desired, the 2005 Recognition of Excellence winners believe they are better prepared. They believe they will be able to recover more quickly this time from the economic downturn because the partnerships and infrastructure are in place. The new North Carolina Research Campus continues to grow, and more biotech and green jobs are expected to be created in the coming months. Optimism is alive.

A growth in population of the two-county area over the next decade is anticipated due to the growth of and the cutting edge laboratory research taking place at the Research Campus. Jeanie Moore, vice president, Continuing Education Program of Rowan-Cabarrus Community College says, "I am so pleased that our work is still relevant. This has become a true passion for me. I will do whatever I can to see that a 'Pillowtex' crisis never happens here again."

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Nick Gennet retired from Central Piedmont as the vice president for Enrollment and Student Services in 2002 and worked with Rowan-Cabarrus on the Pillowtex Project for several years. Nick continues to work with Rowan-Cabarrus on a contract basis part-time.

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