

syncTM Highlights from the North Carolina Department of Commerce



North Carolina Exports Grow By 7% in 2014

North Carolina exported a record \$31 billion in merchandise to international markets in 2014, according to a new report from the U.S. Department of Commerce. The exports mark an increase of 7 percent from 2013 and North Carolina's export growth rate more than doubles the national average growth of 2.8 percent.

"North Carolina's continued export growth shows the international demand for the quality products made in our state," said Governor Pat McCrory. "The global economy offers increasing export opportunities, and we're ready to make the link in services and assistance North Carolina companies need to grow and create jobs here at home."

The state ranked 15th nationally in both overall exports and rate of growth. Canada represents North Carolina's largest export partner, accounting for 22 percent of the state's sales, followed by Mexico (10 percent) and China (9 percent).

North Carolina's most significant merchandise export categories include chemicals, machinery, transportation equipment, computer and electrical products, and textiles. Other export categories with high growth include electrical equipment, appliances and components, food and wood products.

"The North Carolina business community is globally-engaged and we support this growth," said Commerce Secretary John Skvarla. "It's great to see computers, machinery and textiles made in North Carolina sold around the world."

"North Carolina exports have increased by about 35 percent



North Carolina Commerce Secretary John Skvarla (right) and U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas Perez tour Bühler Aeroglide in Cary

N.C. Apprenticeship Programs Highlighted During U.S. Labor Secretary's Visit

U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas E. Perez visited North Carolina February 11 to learn more about the state's successful apprenticeship programs and how the customized training improves employer productivity and strengthens the skills of workers. North Carolina has several apprenticeship programs formed by businesses partnering with [NCWorks](#) and the N.C. Apprenticeship and Training Bureau.

"The 'earn-while-you-learn' apprenticeship model is a win-win for businesses and workers alike. Businesses gain a pipeline of skilled employees in order to grow and workers gain training for jobs that pay well and offer a secure pathway to the middle class," said U.S. Secretary of Labor Perez. "The innovative partnerships developed here in North Carolina should be a model for communities across the country."

Perez met with North Carolina Commerce Secretary John Skvarla, business officials, and apprentices to discuss the importance of apprenticeship programs in strengthening the economy. Bühler Aeroglide of Cary hosted the roundtable discussion, and officials toured the manufacturing facility. Bühler Aeroglide develops industrial systems for food manufacturing.

"I'm proud to highlight how North Carolina's apprenticeship programs are training our

over the past decade, and 2014 was clearly a strong year as well," said John Loyack, vice president of global business services for the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC). "We have seen continued export growth in markets such as Japan, Mexico and Saudi Arabia."

The EDPNC maintains offices around the globe to support export activity and facilitate direct investment in North Carolina. The International Trade Division works with N.C. companies to enter world markets and develop export opportunities. Services include market research, establishing export prospects, and identifying customers and partners.

[Read more.](#)



Frank Salvato, human resource specialist for the City of Greenville, accepts a gold award from Prevention Partners for the city's continuing progress in its WorkHealthy America initiative to improve the health of city employees

Greenville Getting Results on Worker Wellness

In 2010, the City of Greenville in eastern North Carolina opted to self-insure its 850 employees. The city asked its insurance carrier, Cigna Health Care, to implement a wellness initiative. After offering a \$25 incentive encouraging people to participate, just 23 percent of the city's employees completed a health screening and health risk assessment. In a follow-up report, Cigna gave city leaders jaw-dropping findings, including the fact that 76 percent of the city's workforce was at risk in three areas of health or more, and that city employee medical claims were increasing at a rate of \$1 million per year.

"We had a wellness program, but we lacked a standard, a target to reach and the steps to take to achieve that standard," says Frank Salvato, Greenville's Human Resource Specialist. "Success was more than just encouraging employee engagement. Health policies established by the city's management gave us the direction needed and set a course for all to follow."

With new urgency, the city partnered with Prevention Partners, the Chapel Hill-based non-profit. Its WorkHealthy America initiative established standards for nutrition, physical activity, smoking cessation and the overall culture. "This broadened our perspective and challenged us to make changes," said Salvato.

Data from the first three years of the city's concentrated

workforce to be the best in the nation," said Secretary Skvarla. "We're helping businesses become more successful, improving our way of life, and setting an example of economic success for the nation to follow."

Apprenticeships train workers for new skills through a combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job training. Participants earn progressively higher wages as they complete their programs.

[NCWorks Apprenticeship](#) helps companies develop programs that train workers according to an employer's needs.

[Read more.](#)



North Carolina
Main Street

Clinton and Elkin Each Awarded Funds for Downtown Revitalization Projects

The N.C. Department of Commerce announced February 11 that Main Street Solutions have been awarded to the City of Clinton for up to \$200,000 and the Town of Elkin in an amount up to \$100,000.

"This innovative economic development strategy restores our downtowns across the state," said Commerce Secretary John Skvarla, speaking of the Main Street program. "Both of these projects will revitalize historic buildings, assist in creating new jobs and provide positive additional activity in downtown Clinton and Elkin."

The project in Clinton will relocate a restaurant to a historic and currently unoccupied building. This move will provide more space for the restaurant and increase foot traffic downtown. The Elkin project will restore an abandoned landmark theater building on Main Street. The restored theater, along with a new cafe, will serve as a venue for regional music and entertainment.

North Carolina Main Street and Small Town Main Street communities have experienced \$2.2 billion in public and private investment and a net gain of more than 19,000 jobs

wellness initiative demonstrate reasons for any organization considering wellness programs:

- Medical costs have decreased 14.8%
- Costs decreased for nearly all major disease categories except cancer
- Emergency room utilization decreased by 9%
- Cigna's clinical advocacy program identified 57.7% of the city's employees for assistance and engaged 45% of them.

"The culture of individuals taking more responsibility for a healthier lifestyle is taking hold," Salvato says. "We have seen a rippling effect as families participate in our wellness activities and events. Involvement in community events creates belonging and encouragement as our employees see other community members involved in achieving a healthier lifestyle."

Healthy Places Change Lives is a partnership between the N.C. Department of Commerce and Prevention Partners, a nonprofit based in Chapel Hill. Prevention Partners guides schools, workplaces, hospitals and clinics to address the leading causes of preventable disease. The non-profit's Healthy Together NC initiative aims to reach at least 10 organizations in all 100 counties of the state by 2025. Learn more at ForPrevention.org/HealthyTogetherNC



Governor McCrory Outlines Ambitious Economic Agenda In State of the State Address

Governor Pat McCrory introduced an aggressive agenda to create more jobs and grow the state's economy in his 2015 State of the State address, delivered at a joint session of the General Assembly February 4.

"Our economy is improving and our state is growing stronger and stronger with each week that passes," said Governor McCrory. "We have had great success over the past two years, but there is still a lot of work to be done and that's exactly what we will do."

When Governor McCrory was elected, North Carolina had an unemployment rate of 8.8%, the 5th highest in the nation. 77 of the state's 100 counties had unemployment rates over 10%. Today, the unemployment rate is at 5.5% and only two counties have a double-digit unemployment rate. The rate is now the lowest it's been in more than half a decade and better than South Carolina and Tennessee, two of the state's top competitors when recruiting jobs.

The state's competitors are not resting, however, despite North Carolina's gains. To address the competitive environment we face, Governor McCrory highlighted his "NC Competes" plan, a job recruitment proposal that:

- Helps create long-term, sustainable jobs and attract investment
- Encourages mid and large scale manufacturing

since the inception of the program in 1980.

[Read more.](#)

Rural Division Awards Competitive Grants

North Carolina Secretary of Commerce John Skvarla and Assistant Secretary for Rural Economic Development Pat Mitchell announced February 6 the recipients of the FY2015 Economic Development Competitive Grants for Underserved and Limited Resource Communities (ULRC).

The ULRC program provides grants to local governments and non-profits totaling up to \$1.75 million. The purpose of the program is to encourage economic development activities, services or projects that benefit underserved populations and limited resource communities across the state.

"The goal of these grants is to make sure that North Carolina's rural communities have the necessary funds available to carry out projects to help the local economy," said Secretary Skvarla. "All of the projects selected will help make a difference in each community."

There are six project categories funded by the program: agriculture, health care, cultural & performing arts, small business development, planning and coastal projects.

[Read more.](#)

N.C. in the News

This Week's Highlights

- [Gov. McCrory Visits Brunswick Manufacturer To Tout Collaborative Training](#) (*WilmingtonBiz.com* - February 13)
- [CPCC's Tony Zeiss wants to increase college's role in luring jobs](#) (*Charlotte Observer* - February 15)
- [High-profile panel talks STEM, venture capital at Emerging Issues Forum](#) (*Triangle Business Journal* - February 9)
- [Dillsboro leaders eye incentives to attract businesses](#) (*The Sylva Herald* - February 11)
- [N.C. State Professor: Charlotte vs. Raleigh Attitude Has to Stop - and Here's Why](#) (*Charlotte Business Journal* - February 11)
- [NCTA: North Carolina ranks No.1 for women in technology](#) (*Charlotte Business Journal* - February 9)
- [UNC Charlotte opening \\$2M Siemens Energy Lab at EPIC](#) (*Charlotte Business Journal* - February 9)
- [Golden Leaf's \\$50M commitment makes](#)

- Leverages our university research advantage to attract new venture capital
- Recognizes the importance of all regions in our state with emphasis on areas of high unemployment

The Governor also voiced support for the renewal of the Historic Preservation Tax Credit to help revitalize North Carolina's main streets and town centers.

[Read more.](#)

[Transcript of the State of the State Address.](#)



A dentist provides a free screening at the Jacksonville Stand Down

Jacksonville Stand Down Event Helps Homeless Vets

The veterans team from the NCWorks Career Center in Onslow County held its 5th annual Veterans Stand Down February 3 in Jacksonville.

"A veterans stand down is where a whole host of services for veterans come together," said Kelley Hamilton, a disabled veterans outreach specialist at the center. "It's targeted to the homeless and indigent veterans, but it's open to everyone."

"We're here to find out what they need and what services we can provide," said Gerardo "Gerry" Cruz, the veteran employment supervisor for the NCWorks Career Center in Onslow County. "If they're homeless, then that's the first issue we have to resolve. We have to make sure their basic needs are taken care of; then, we can start to help them find a job."

Several community partners come together for Stand Downs across North Carolina, which are organized in part by NCWorks Career Centers. The events connect homeless vets with career center staff and other community partners and provide sleeping bags, thermal underwear, food, and hygiene supplies at no cost. A local dentist gave free screenings to participants at the Jacksonville event.

Military Missions in Action, another partner at the event, works with people struggling with Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. "We can't solve the homeless veterans problem," said Michael Dorman, executive director of the group. "But if we can make them as comfortable as possible in the conditions they live in, we've succeeded in making their lives a little bit better." Dorman's group participated in 18 Stand Downs in 2014.

[N.C. megasites more competitive](#) (*Triad Business Journal* - February 9)

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