



Roger Howell and Friends performing at the I-26 West Welcome Center.

Welcome Centers Celebrate North Carolina Culture for Travel and Tourism Week

N.C. Commerce's nine Welcome Centers celebrated National Travel and Tourism Week earlier this month by joining with local tourism partners to personally thank North Carolina visitors for traveling to the state.

In addition to highlighting the role travel plays in the U.S. economy, Travel and Tourism Week offered an excellent opportunity for North Carolina's attractions and accommodations to directly assist people seeking travel information at the state's Welcome Centers. At all nine centers, tourism partners joined professional Welcome Center staff in providing first-hand information, brochures, giveaways, displays and demonstrations as visitors drove into North Carolina.

Strong participation from local convention and visitors bureaus, attractions, lodging partners, State Parks, Historic Sites, museums and the North Carolina Zoo ensured that visitors got a warm North Carolina welcome as they entered the state, whether on I-26, I-40, I-77, I-85, or I-95.

For example, Sid Luck, a fifth generation potter, threw pots at the I-95 South Welcome Center in Robeson County, as visitors lined up to sample Parker's Barbecue from Wilson, to see Native American musicians play and to hear bagpipes echo across the lawn.

NCWorks @ Work: Helping Businesses Find the Workers They Need

When Elite Metal Performance, LLC needed to find a talented new employee, it knew where to turn to for help - NCWorks.

Elite Metal's 11-person team specializes in making custom trailers, racing products, parts for biomedical companies, installing bailors and offering machine shop services. The business turned to the [Centralina Workforce Development Board](#) - a member of the NCWorks initiative - for help with finding the right person for the job.

"Because it's skilled labor we're looking for, often times it was difficult to find what we were looking for," said Michelle Beck, office administrator for Elite Metal. "Even though we were willing to train or be open-minded, it was very hard to find someone with those skills."

NCWorks helped the company establish an On-the-Job Training (OJT) program, in which the participating business hires someone and trains them for a particular position. As part of the program, the employer is reimbursed for up to half of that employee's salary. The program allows the company to train a person to do the job in a way that best meets the needs of the employer.

In the past, Elite Metal looked for candidates through OJT without using any type of pre-screening or training process for applicants. More recently, the company asked Centralina to pre-screen candidates first through a six-month process that includes classes on writing resumes, developing personal and communications skills, and more.

"We [felt they were] very selective when it comes to job candidates, and it's best to take their classes and go through their process rather than doing hiring the way we did it in the past," said Beck, adding that the training process improved the applicants' confidence levels and helped them prepare to re-enter the workforce.

OJT is one of many NCWorks services available to businesses, who can also take advantage of free pre-screening and job referrals. Employers are also encouraged to

Participation by local artisans, including potters, weavers, dancers and musicians, provided visitors with a sampling of North Carolina culture at all nine locations.

Young and old alike from Madison County turned out at the I-26 West Welcome Center to celebrate the impact of tourism in the Appalachian region and to enjoy music and dancing with visitors. "Roger Howell and Friends" performed at this Welcome Center throughout the day.

North Carolina's Welcome Centers promote thousands of tourism-related businesses - attractions, accommodations, events and more - to visitors arriving in the state actively seeking travel information. Located on Interstates just inside the state line, each Welcome Center has a statewide focus, with an emphasis on information for visitors traveling a particular interstate corridor. Professional, nationally-certified travel counselors distribute the state's Official North Carolina Travel Guide, the Department of Transportation's official state map, and other marketing publications exclusively about North Carolina; offer detailed travel information in clean, modern facilities; and book room reservations at no charge for visitors staying overnight in North Carolina. The Welcome Centers are open from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. 361 days each year.

North Carolina tourism generated record visitor spending in 2015 with a total of \$21.9 billion, a 2.7 percent increase over 2014 which outpaced the national average for growth last year of only 2.1 percent. Additionally, tourism industry-supported employment topped 211,000 jobs to set another record for the state. Visitors spent nearly \$60 million per day in North Carolina last year and contributed about \$4.9 million per day in state and local tax revenues as a result of that spending.



N.C. Commerce Secretary John Skvarla delivers opening remarks at the NC Competes for Jobs event in Shelby May 17.

NC Competes for Jobs Tour Visits Shelby and Lumberton; Statesville Scheduled for June 2

Governor Pat McCrory invites local community leaders to join N.C. Commerce Secretary John Skvarla and his economic development and workforce team for the NC Competes for Jobs Tour. The tour stops in Statesville on Thursday, June 2.

The session will convene at 1:00 p.m. The Statesville event is being held at Mitchell Community College in the Huskins Library, Rotary Auditorium.

register with [NCWorks Online](#) to find and contact applicants whose education levels, skills, and training align with what businesses are looking for in their applicants.

NCWorks and the OJT program paid off for Elite Metal. After the candidates completed the pre-screening and training process, Elite Metal hired one of them as a machine shop worker. That individual has since completed the program and is now a valuable member of the company.

"He's very willing to learn," Beck said. "He's not just here - he's willing to learn and do things. I think he knows we put time into him and he's not just someone off the street who we hired, so to speak."

NCWorks @ Work is a SYNC series highlighting success stories from North Carolina's integrated workforce development system. More information about [NCWorks is online.](#)



Southeast-Canadian Business Conference on Tap in Nashville

N.C. Commerce Secretary John E. Skvarla, III will lead North Carolina's presence at the 9th annual Southeast U.S.-Canadian Provinces Alliance conference being held in Nashville, Tennessee this coming weekend, May 26 - 28.

The annual gathering, with a particular focus on trade initiatives, offers attendees significant business-to-business (B2B) opportunities for networking and information exchange. This year's meeting theme is 'Gaining Competitive Advantage to Sustain Economic Growth'.

Canada is a major economic partner for the State of North Carolina. GF Linamar, a joint venture involving Canadian-based Linamar Corporation, announced in February it was creating 350 manufacturing jobs in Henderson County with a facility bringing \$217 million in capital investment to the state. North Carolina exporters sold \$6.8 billion in goods to Canada in 2015, a 7% increase over 2014 and 16% increase over the last 5 years.

This year's conference agenda includes sessions covering healthcare, medical devices, transportation and logistics, and intellectual property.

On Tuesday, May 17 Secretary Skvarla and the N.C. Commerce team hosted community leaders from five counties in Shelby at Cleveland Community College. The next day in Lumberton, community leaders from six state counties joined the Commerce team at Robeson Community College.

The *NC Competes for Jobs* events offer attendees a fast-paced, information-packed session outlining solutions N.C. Commerce offers to local leaders for the work of growing their local economies.

Attendees learn more about:

- Grants and loans available for local economic development
- Available assistance to plan and build local infrastructure, water and sewer
- Finding and training local workers, using the state's NCWorks system
- Regulatory reforms to the state's business climate
- Changes in the state's tax rates
- The team at N.C. Commerce, and how to contact the right people who can help

There is still time to RSVP for the Statesville event; to do so, send an email to rsvp@nccommerce.com. For information about future tour stops, [email James Estes in the Secretary's office](#).



More than 100 people gathered in Lumberton May 18 for Commerce's *NC Competes for Jobs* event.

The SEUS-CP 2016 Alliance is made up of the jurisdictions of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

The 2017 edition of the conference is scheduled to be held in Manitoba.



The prototype of a license plate featuring North Carolina's new brand. Artist concept subject to change.

Sign Up for New State Brand License Plate

Claim your new 'Nothing Compares' license plate to display on your vehicle by visiting this special page on N.C. Commerce's website: nccommerce.com/nc-license-plate.

Show your pride on your ride in North Carolina: where everything is possible and Nothing Compares!

N.C. in the News

- [Census: Raleigh, Durham move up list of nation's largest cities](#) (*News & Observer* - May 19)
- [Charlotte attracts new residents in droves, ranking among fastest-growing cities in U.S.](#) (*Charlotte Business Journal* - May 19)
- [Retiring RTRP CEO to take on new role at N.C. State University](#) (*Triangle Business Journal* - May 19)
- [Business Leaders Tout Area to Industry Site Selectors](#) (*The Pilot* - Southern Pines - May 17)
- [EPIC: University-Industry Partnership in North Carolina](#) (*Transmission & Distribution World* - May 17)
- [Letter to the Editor: NC Works Center makes a difference](#) (*The Times-News* - Burlington - May 15)
- [Community leaders, Delta officials launch RDU - Paris route with fanfare](#) (*Triangle Business Journal* - May 12)
- [Bill submitted that would end county economic tier designations](#) (*Winston-Salem Journal* - May 12)
- [Report: Raleigh-Durham ranks No. 4 as startup hub](#) (*Triangle Business Journal* -

May 11)

About Us

SYNC is North Carolina Commerce's electronic newsletter for local government officials, private-sector allies, state policy makers, and other economic development leaders. We offer unfiltered details about new economic development projects and events, useful news about your peers, and opportunities to synchronize with statewide programs and tools in order to advance economic development in your community. [Send your story ideas to the editor.](#)

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