

## **DRIVING TOWARD A PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR CATAWBA COUNTY**

By Randy Isenhower, Chair, Catawba County Board of Commissioners

In the spirit of the holiday season, I join with fellow commissioners Vice-Chair Barbara Beatty, Kitty Barnes, Sherry Butler, and Dan Hunsucker to wish you a very Merry Christmas.

As we reflect on this past year, we have taken action toward enhancing our quality of life in Catawba County, such as the recent acquisition of more than 200 acres to expand Riverbend Park and the newly-opened extension of the Carolina Thread Trail at the Government Center. We've begun planning a new recreation area, Mountain Creek Park, in southeastern Catawba County – an area which continues to grow through the construction of new neighborhoods and retail centers. Our Library System is transforming into an exceptionally innovative community hub through access to leading-edge technology, digital literacy training, and wireless hot spots to increase connectivity. And we are working to address newly-identified County health priorities – chronic disease prevention, healthy eating, and active living – through lifestyle-based programs in partnership with our school systems, our faith communities, and local healthcare providers.

County government provided a diversity and depth of services to our citizens in 2016. In addition to the quality work delivered by County staff on a daily basis, we continued to raise the bar with award-winning initiatives in the areas of child welfare, youth emancipation, tax information, budget management, technology, agriculture, and historical preservation.

All of this good work has inspired the Board to bring new energy to our vision of a thriving future for Catawba County. Like many communities in North Carolina today, Catawba County faces significant challenges to long-term economic growth and community prosperity.

While this growth has always been a priority for the Board, we have begun leading a coordinated strategic plan to drive Catawba County's economic competitiveness forward in collaboration with local municipalities and community partners.

This work has traditionally focused on creating viable employment opportunities and developing skilled workers, and we have made significant progress in these areas. Over the past fiscal year, our economic development efforts generated 434 new jobs and increased new investments to \$517 million in the County. The spec facility in Claremont Business Park fulfilled its promise by attracting DAE Systems, a manufacturer serving the aerospace and defense markets, from California to Catawba County. We recently broke ground on another innovative development, Park 1764, a 170-acre Class A business park designed to attract office and light industrial businesses.

However, we know that if we want to remain competitive in today's global economy, we can't stop there. We must also proactively recruit and retain those workers by making Catawba County a top choice for the workforce of today and tomorrow.

This involves decisive action in several critical growth sectors, such as economic development, education, infrastructure, and technology. But it also involves continuing to enhance quality of life through recreation, health, safety, and arts and culture. We are looking beyond traditional growth strategies to create compelling reasons for working-age adults to make a life for themselves and their families in Catawba County.

We have already taken action in these areas in 2016, and we are committed to leading this vision well into the future. And as we look forward to an exciting 2017, the Board wishes you and your loved ones a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year.