

Top story – January 29, 2022

Boom Supersonic plans slow, steady approach to hiring for planned PTI jobs



Gov. Roy Cooper receives a model of Boom Supersonic's Overture jet from Boom's President and Chief Business Officer Kathy Savitt during an announcement, Wednesday, that the aviation company will build its supersonic jet at Piedmont Triad International Airport in Greensboro. The company said it will employ more than 1,700 people by the end of the decade. Walt Unks, Journal

Patience — as has been the case with most major Triad economic-development projects — will be required for residents who want a high-paying job at Boom Supersonic.

The company said Wednesday it plans to begin hiring in 2023 after the construction of its \$500 million “superfactory” reaches certain thresholds.

The facility will feature manufacturing, assembly, testing and distribution operations.

Construction of the 400,000-square-foot facility is slated to begin later this year on a 65-acre property at Piedmont Triad International Airport. The first Overture jet is expected to go into commercial airline service in 2029.



Winston-Salem mayor Allen Joines, who also serves on the Piedmont Triad Airport Authority board, speaks during announcement, Wednesday. Walt Unks, Journal

consideration when we selected this site,” Savitt said.

Triad residents willing to move temporarily to the Denver suburbs could get a head start on a local job. Boom currently lists 31 openings on the careers link at its website.

Savitt said the first significant boost to the local workforce will come from offering more than 200 apprenticeship and internships, potentially as early as 2023 and through 2032. Those opportunities will be posted on the careers link.

Savitt said the apprenticeships and internships are specifically meant for students who attend universities, community colleges or technical schools “anywhere in North Carolina.”

Kathy Savitt, Boom’s president and chief business officer, said it’s too early to begin unveiling hiring plans beyond the commitment to 1,761 jobs by 2030 and at least 2,400 jobs by 2032. The average annual wage is estimated at about \$68,000.

It’s not all that dissimilar to the hiring patterns of Caterpillar Inc., Dell Inc., Egger Wood Products, FedEx Corp., Gildan Activewear Inc., Herbalife Nutrition Ltd., Honda Aircraft Co. and Sturm, Ruger & Co., many of which — outside the closed Dell plant — remain in constant hiring mode.

Savitt said the goal is to have a mixture of as many local hires as possible, while also searching nationwide for key positions that can’t be filled. Those will include production, assemblers, research and development, and engineers.

“We’re going to leverage the great workforce that’s here. It was one of the significant factors we took into

“We earnestly believe that students will want to work for Boom,” Levitt said.

Kevin Baker, PTI’s executive director, said that with an average \$52,000 household income within a 35-mile radius of the airport, “it will be one person bringing that much home (from Boom) rather than both adults in the household.”

“The message is that these aren’t just going to be a bunch of jobs here, but a bunch of good-paying jobs,” Baker said.

Baker said that if/when Boom reaches its initial goal of 1,761 workers, it would boost the total PTI campus workforce to more than 10,000 given its current level of about 8,600.

“Combined, we’re already the fifth-largest employer sector in the Triad,” Baker said.

Gov. Roy Cooper expressed confidence that Boom, along with Toyota Motor North America’s electric-vehicle battery plant at the Greensboro-Randolph megasite, will inspire students and young adults to pursue advanced manufacturing training.

“We have to make sure we can supply the educated, diverse workforce that these companies need, and they believe we can,” Cooper said.

“We know there are labor shortages in a number of areas.

“By creating these new, better-paying jobs, the supply chains will follow, and that will, in turn, help create the ecosystem we need to sustain these projects,” Cooper said.

Will suppliers come?

With Boom taking just 65 of the 1,000 available acres for economic development at PTI, there should be ample room for suppliers to locate next or near the superfactory.

Baker said that PTI and the airport authority are restricted in terms of recruitment in that the Federal Aviation Administration “requires that airport land be used by tenants who need to be on an airport.”

“We could not locate a distribution center for a retailer, or an auto manufacturer, etc.”

Baker expects that suppliers who are vertically integrated into the Boom assembly process, like wing box manufacturer, empennage (an arrangement of stabilizing surfaces at the tail of an aircraft) and fuselage “could be co-located with the final assembly, while many won’t need to be on the airport at all.”

“Supplier discussions are the company’s thing, not ours.”

Yet, there's an understandable level of skepticism about how many suppliers actually will open operations here to serve Boom.

When the Dell Inc. desktop-assembly plant was at a similar celebratory stage of its announcement, there were two extensive reports released in 2004 that estimated between 4,500 and 6,500 supplier and other indirect jobs would be created to serve the \$110 million plant.

However, only about 500 ever emerged, and most of those were distribution jobs embedded in the plant which closed in 2010.

After citing discussions with Rolls-Royce about Overture's propulsion system, Savitt expressed that Boom's supply chain will "cross all aspects of our program."

"This important supply chain is going to converge right here in the Triad."

Cooper said that while landing the Boom and Toyota projects are high-profile economic win for the Triad, the region has been benefiting in recent years from "quietly amassing companies in the advanced-manufacturing and aeronautics areas.

"All of it shows this area has a significant future ahead of it."

Paradigm shift

Winston-Salem Mayor Allen Joines called Boom "a paradigm shift" for the Triad given not only the manufacturer's job and capital-investment commitment, but also "the companies that will come here as suppliers and service providers."

"I believe we may look back 10 years from now and say that this was the day that we stopped talking about what we can be, and actually became what we are today."

Site-selection expert John H. Boyd, founder and principal of The Boyd Co. Inc. of Boca Raton, Fla., said he has "no doubts that the Triad can supply the labor resources to Boom."

As an example, Boyd harkened back — without malevolent intent — to the early 1990s and what proved to be a game-changing missed manufacturing opportunity for the Triad.

"A doubting Thomas can only look at the experience of BMW in Spartanburg, S.C. in 1992," Boyd said.

"At the time, there was no precedent for auto production in South Carolina, and its ability to supply the necessary labor was very much in question."

When asked by a newspaper reporter about whether BMW had made a strategic mistake, Boyd said he responded by saying "staffing the plant would be no problem for BMW given the fact that

hourly workers do relocate for the kind of jobs offered by the auto industry given its wages, benefits and security, along with the low cost of living in Greenville/Spartanburg area.”

Fast-forward 30 years and BMW in Spartanburg has a workforce exceeding 11,000 that builds about 1,500 BMWs every day.

“The current facility represents an investment of \$10.6 billion that includes two massive body shops, two paint shops, two assembly halls and an elaborate logistics operation,” Boyd said. “The plant ships finished cars to more than 125 countries around the world.

“I see a similar playbook for Boom here in the Triad.”