

Blending Business and Sustainability

## **KEEP THE GREEN IN GEORGETOWN**

BY RYAN NEWHOUSE

Can economic growth and environmental progress ever go hand in hand? Absolutely, according to The Alliance for Economic Development for Georgetown County.

The Alliance, as it is commonly known, is a private, tiered partnership aimed at building a sustainable commercial climate and attracting new "green" businesses, which both provide jobs and secure the area's environmental future.

It is able to offer expedited assistance for companies that want to relocate to the county. It is also free to raise money through grant funds and private donations, taking a significant burden off local taxpayers.

Of course, it isn't just about attracting large national firms, either. The Alliance also partners with the Georgetown County Chamber of Commerce on helping foster revenue-creating homegrown and family-run enterprises, which make up the economic backbone of the community.

Currently on the table are two major initiatives: The Green Coast and Wind Energy for Georgetown County. The idea behind each is to establish the region as a green-business-friendly destination and showcase environmental conservation programs already in process.

"[Those two concepts are] still in the early stages," says Wayne Gregory, director of economic development at Georgetown County. "The branding effort is well underway [but] the word is [already] getting out about what we have to offer."

Gregory says that raising awareness about Georgetown and its environs as the "Green Coast" will entice environment-centered, high-tech and energy-related firms. The Alliance plans to play up the mild climate, skilled workforce and low cost of doing business, as well as a solid transportation infrastructure via road, railway and water routes.

For interested companies, the Alliance will

Georgetown
County is
poised to
harness an
immense
amount of
wind energy,
making it a
key player
for power
generation for
the Eastern
Seaboard
(above and
right).

provide everything from site selection (the county has three well established industrial parks) to assistance with financing and government relations.

While the Alliance aids companies with all of those services, it is also spearheading an energy project that could impact more than just the local coastal area.

"We have a great place for a wind farm," says Bill Crowther, executive director of the Alliance. "The water doesn't get very deep right off the coast, which means it will be cheaper to place turbines out there, and since there is little or no housing in the area, ocean views won't be compromised."

Based on environmental studies of the area, average wind speeds at three nautical miles from the shore exceed 8.1 miles per second, making for ideal conditions. In fact, Georgetown County sits at the heart of a coastal region between between Cape Hatteras, N.C., and Cape Canaveral, Fla. known as the South Atlantic Bight. This area, if seeded with turbines, has the potential to harness 25 percent of all of the wind energy generated by offshore wind farms along the East Coast.

"We'll start with three or four wind turbines as a test," says Crowther, "and then we'll build on from there."

The Alliance expects to sell the electricity eventually generated by a full-capacity farm to energy company Santee Cooper, which



will distribute it to consumers.

With its expanding initiatives, the Alliance has not only set the stage for an influx of business, but has begun the task of setting the standard in the region for environmentally responsible growth.



