

STAYING NEIGHBORS: 'ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORKS'



JOURNAL PHOTO BY JENNIFER ROTENZER

Denna Payne loads her machine, a payment-book inserter, at SouthData in Mount Airy.

Homegrown

SouthData Inc. finishes \$4 million renovation, expansion of company

By Sherry Youngquist
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MOUNT AIRY

SouthData Inc., one of the largest printers of payment-coupon books in the United States, has completed a \$4 million investment and expansion into a 65,000-square-foot building formerly occupied by a textile mill in Mount Airy.

"Economic development works," said John Springthorpe III, the company's president, who used cash and tax incentives from the city and Surry County to move his company from a smaller location in Mount Airy last fall into the building, which had been abandoned by Russell Corp.

Since then, 15 jobs have been created in production, computer programming, customer service and graphic design.

The idea was to work with an exist-

ing industry that would invest in the county long-term, local officials said. Robin Rhyne, the president of the Surry County Economic Development Partnership, has increasingly put more emphasis on the value of companies already rooted in the community.

"Robin and I think the importance surrounding existing industry is that it provides your largest investment dollar and your largest job creation," said Ron Sutphin, the vice president of the economic development partnership. "Existing industry generally is responsible for about 70 percent of all the new jobs that are created. It's just not as flashy. They add 10 jobs here and 10 more there."

Last year, SouthData worked out an incentives agreement with the city of Mount Airy and Surry County that would give the company about

\$135,000 in cash and tax breaks, provided that it made an initial investment of more than \$1 million and created 20 jobs, said John Overton, the city's finance director.

SouthData began in 1985 as an entrepreneurial idea to provide payment books and billing statements, Springthorpe said. It has grown into a national document provider and now has clients in government, medical facilities, health care, insurance and commercial print markets.

In 2004, the company employed 42 people.

Today, SouthData employs 71, a number that more than doubles to 146 during peak production months of November and December.

The company is trying to fill nine more positions.

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"What sets us apart is that we are more computer-oriented than most of our competitors," said Springthorpe, adding that SouthData's own computer programmers write programs specific to a company's needs.

SouthData has recently begun offering a service that allows clients to use the company's Web site to build a newslet-

ter. SouthData then is able to provide that client's newsletter to a specified market by way of SouthData's database management, printing and mailing services.

"We could have these out in three days," said Chelli Perry Bruner, the company's marketing director. "Industry standard is two weeks."

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