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Is Kannapolis prepared for new future?

Charlotte Business Journal - by [Kathy Nelson](#)

How will Cabarrus and Rowan counties and the surrounding region meet the work-force and education needs of the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis? If you ask Mac Holladay, those are the most critical challenges facing the area.

Holladay, chief executive of **Market Street Services** of Atlanta, is no stranger to Kannapolis or Cabarrus County. His company led Kannapolis through an analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in 2006, in preparation for the influx of jobs the research campus will bring.

According to Market Street, jobs on the campus are expected to total 5,535 by 2013. The average annual wage will be \$58,663, with the campus having a total economic impact of about \$325 million.

In an interview this week with the *Charlotte Business Journal*, Holladay discussed the challenges ahead in Kannapolis. Edited excerpts follow:

You've been studying the Kannapolis market for some time. Have things played out as you thought they would?

The movement of construction and the serious partnerships with the three flagship universities moved quicker than I thought it would. The campus itself is having an impact on anybody who sees it. This opportunity is so transformational to the region.

But there are existing industries that already have vacancies — health care, motorsports and hospitality. There's already a work-force crisis, with more than 2,000 open jobs and more coming. Business as usual is not going to get it.

What's been the biggest surprise?

How the community college leaders, school superintendents and steering committee members have been so willing to talk to us. They have been as candid as they can be. It's a tough climate. There's no other way to describe this than a crisis.

What will be the biggest challenge for the community in meeting its educational needs?

There's so many. At the end of the day, the transformation of the culture will be most

important. Education was not valued (in the past). There was a mill-town mindset.

And in terms of work-force development?

It is keeping your eye on the fact that motorsports companies in the region don't want fans, they want trained technicians. The cultural and capacity issues have to be resolved.

The economy continues to change. The work force is facing Philip Morris job losses, and the best inventory of workers is there. We need a strategy to keep those people here. It will take a proactive effort, and it needs to get under way yesterday.

To learn more about the Cabarrus and Rowan initiative led by Market Street Services, go to www.cr21stcentury.info.

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