

(DRAFT FOR REVIEW AND EDITS ONLY)

Next Step: A Career For the Future

Continental Tire Workers Have a Career Path for the Future

In a perfect world, all 500 employees that recently lost their jobs at the Continental Tire plant in Charlotte would already be gearing up to start their new jobs at another business just down the road.

We're obviously not living in a perfect world.

Employees from the company have spent half their lives at the manufacturing plant on Westinghouse Blvd., only to be left wondering, "what's next?" Some are also questioning whether or not they have the skills to move into a new job this late in their career. Unfortunately, this is not new to anyone in the Charlotte region who has been involved in the manufacturing or textile industries. According to local labor market data more than 4,700 workers in the region were laid off from their jobs last year.

The layoffs are not new either to the four organizations that focus on workforce development in the Charlotte region. In the midst of a changing economy, the Centralina, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and Gaston Workforce Development Boards in North Carolina have joined forces with the Catawba Regional Workforce Investment Board from South Carolina to create the ***Competitive Workforce Alliance***. The goal of the Alliance is to take a regional snapshot of workforce development in Charlotte region and create a competitive edge to ensure that there is a plan in place that helps workers like those at Continental Tire, become the drivers of our future economy.

The foundation of the Alliance's collaborative effort is North Carolina's JobLink Career Centers (known as One-Stop Career Centers in South Carolina), whose goal is to improve the Charlotte region's workforce and strengthen the state's economy by offering labor market information to business and workers, providing access to career training and job placement services, and serving as the connection between employers and qualified workers. This is the connection that many of the displaced workers at Continental Tire need.

A response team has already been to the tire plant to talk with employees and help them not only re-enter the workforce, but to start a career path that will take them into the future.

Our process was put to the test in 2003 as more than 5,000 workers were laid off from Pillowtex. At the time, more than ## visited the Alliance's network of JobLink Career Centers, resulting in ## individuals finding jobs, received training and career counseling. The effort resulted in the transition of Pillowtex textile workers to jobs in promising

industry clusters such as logistics, transportation, distribution, advanced manufacturing, healthcare and the booming motorsports industry in the region.

While it's difficult to think about the future while in the midst of a crisis, the workers from Continental Tire and others in the area who have lost their jobs should think about this as a stepping stone to a new career: a career that will take each individual and their families into the economy of the future. Our local Boards and our JobLink/One-Stop system can provide the tools to help everyone succeed.

David Hollars, Deborah Gibson Julie Armstrong, and Robert Barber are executive directors for the Centralina, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Gaston, and Catawba Regional Workforce Development Boards, which make up the Competitive Workforce Alliance.