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**All Pieces In Place**  
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**Mining Talent**


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## Slaked Thirst

Between 2004 and 2007, **Coors** is investing more than \$200 million at its Elkton brewery in Rockingham County, not far east of Harrisonburg along I-81. That Interstate is also prime to the sites of **PepsiCo's** \$140-million, 250-job Gatorade facility rising at Wythe County Progress Park, and the \$105-million, 144-job supporting investment in a PET blowmolding operation next door by **Amcort Group**. To facilitate the projects, a \$9-million electric substation is also going in from **Appalachian Power**.

As of late April 2006 – as PepsiCo staff worked out of offices at Wytheville Community College and used some of the office amenities at the Joint Industrial Development Authority itself – some 3,400 applications had been received for Gatorade's 250 positions.

That's an indication of a region thirsty for quality jobs. And by all signs the tall glass of water is being poured across southwest and south-central Virginia.

In Danville, on the same day as Amcor's announcement in summer 2005, electronic design and manufacturing firm **EIT** announced a \$12-million manufacturing investment that will create 120 jobs in the Pittsylvania County community. That project was followed up in January 2006 by the announcement that **Timken Co.** would invest \$10 million and add 50 jobs at its wheel-hub bearing assembly plant in Altavista, just across the county line from Pittsylvania County in Campbell County. And power and automation company **ABB Inc.** completed the triangle earlier this year with the announcement of a \$25.3-million, 127 job investment at its South Boston electrical transformer plant in neighboring Halifax County, about 30 minutes east of Danville. The firm also announced a \$3-million, 30-job expansion at its Bland County plant, near the West Virginia state line.

Circling back to Danville, February saw the announcement of a 9-million, 194-job facility from shopping cart maker **Unarco**. And the Cane Creek Centre industrial park is filling up with forest products projects. First, in 2005, came the \$19-million, 540-job plant from **Yorktowne Cabinetry**. That was followed up in October 2006 by a \$281-million, 740-job investment from **IKEA** furniture manufacturing subsidiary Swedwood North America. The 810,000-sq.-ft. (75,249-sq.-m.) facility is expected to be producing furniture by September 2007 on its 208-acre (84-hectare) spread, assembled from parts of two to three parcels the park had been marketing separately. Meanwhile, Cane Creek Centre, jointly owned by Danville and Pittsylvania County, is still offering eight other parcels ranging in size from 38 to 90 acres (15 to 26 hectares).

Most of Swedwood's 36 production plants across nine countries are in eastern Europe, including a combined timber processing plant and furniture factory it is now building in Karelia, Russia. This factory will be the Swedish company's first furniture production location in the United States. Pending permits and construction, the facility will open in early 2008. The company plans to open between 3 and 5 stores a year in North America. IKEA's most recent North American non-store project was its huge distribution center announced last year in Savannah, Ga., the company's seventh on the continent, joining facilities in Bristol, Pa.; Brossard, Que.; Perryville, Md.; Tejon, Calif.; Vancouver, B.C.; and Westampton, N.J. The site selection process for the Savannah facility had considered the Port of Virginia.

"The close proximity to many IKEA stores and distribution centers, coupled with good regional infrastructure and available land, make Danville ideal for this North American

production facility," said Bengt Danielsson, North American president of Swedwood. "Our ability to meet the home furnishing needs of consumers throughout North America with our growing number of stores now will be enhanced by producing well-designed and functional home furnishings here as well," said Pernille Lopez, North American president of IKEA.

Gov. Kaine approved a \$3-million grant from the Governor's Opportunity Fund to assist the localities with the project, as well as a \$1-million grant from the Virginia Investment Partnership program, a performance-based incentive available to qualifying existing Virginia firms, to close the deal. The Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission approved \$2.4 million in Tobacco Region Opportunity Funds. The company is eligible to receive state benefits from the Virginia Enterprise Zone Program. And the first phase of the project also qualifies for up to \$1.35 million in rail and economic access grants from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation and the Virginia DOT, respectively.

Ron Bunch, director of the City of Danville Office of Economic Development, says his team started working with Swedwood in February, when the firm was considering multiple states in the Southeast and multiple sites in Virginia. He praises the partnership with Pittsylvania County, and says the larger southern region has its own momentum, thanks to new leadership in several jurisdictions, and thanks to the attentions of both the Tobacco Commission and Gov. Tim Kaine.

Bunch says the main concerns of Swedwood leaders were related to "the labor force, transportation to include rail, the readiness of the site and the overall cost of doing business going into the future."

Helping Swedwood's future outlook was the future outlook of the region itself, as it recovers from the quick exit of textile and tobacco with nearly as quick a resurgence: Bunch says his area has seen 21 projects in the past two and a half years.

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