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## New NCEDA president talks JDIG, Toyota, opportunities

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Mark Pope, the newly elected president of the N.C. Economic Development Association, has high expectations for job creators in the state.

"We're busier than ever," he says. "But you know, that can always shift. Economic winds can change in a hurry. We've just got to make sure we're ready for what's in front of us now and for what could happen."

Pope, the executive director of Lenoir County Economic Development, has personally helped usher in high-profile expansions such as Spirit Aerosystems and Sanderson Farms. And with NCEDA, a 600-member statewide organization working to promote North Carolina as a global destination for economic investment, he hopes to promote even more investment in the years to come.

In an interview days after commencing his NCEDA post, Pope talks through the challenges of winning major projects – and what could expedite developers' efforts across the state.

The state's assets are obvious, he says. He points to its college-fueled workforce and quality of life rankings.

But there are major challenges. He says it's more important than ever for economic developers across the state to "stay well equipped" and to "work together in competing with other states."

And that means promoting training initiatives – which he says is key in maintaining the talent pool that's leading to so many project wins.

He says the JDIGs – Job Development Investment Grant – are increasingly important in closing deals.

"We would love to see the cap raised completely off that so it can benefit us even more," he says.

And rural communities are dependent on the funds. That's why, should the Triangle land thousands of jobs from Apple, rural communities, too, should be paying attention. He points to utility fund allocations that come with JDIGs.

"That's the funnel for rural communities," he says, noting eastern North Carolina entities use the funds for infrastructure improvements that they can then use to lure manufacturers to the state. "JDIG is our way of



NCEDA

Mark Pope was just named president of NCEDA.

getting all of that.”

Hooking the next big economic development win will take a bipartisan commitment, he predicts.

Pope uses the Toyota-Mazda effort as an example that it’s possible. While the automakers ultimately picked Alabama for an automobile assembly plant, the near-miss “set a precedent that North Carolina is still open for business,” Pope says.

“We did demonstrate, unmistakably, that North Carolina’s elected officials are on the same page when it comes to job creation and economic opportunity,” he says, a reference to the \$1.5 billion incentives package the state had been prepared to offer.

In addition to Pope, new NCEDA officers include Patricia Mitchell as vice president. Mitchell is an assistant professor and interim director of the MPA program at Appalachian State University. Randall Johnson, executive director of the Southeastern Regional Office of the North Carolina Biotechnology Center in Wilmington is serving as secretary-treasurer. NCEDA members just elected to three year terms on NCEDA’s board of directors include Julie Roper, who manages economic development and local government relations at PSNC Energy; Ryan Wetherington, vice president at Allen Tate Corporate Services & Relocation; and Alan Wood, president and CEO of Burke Development, Inc.

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