

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Wage growth not uniform across Cape Fear region



Growth among medical and pharmaceutical businesses like AAIPharma Services Corp., which has added jobs and new facilities in Wilmington, has helped New Hanover County add high-paying jobs in recent years.



STARNEWS FILE PHOTOS



Employment in the construction industry has been hit hard since 2008, although job numbers are starting to slowly bounce back.



New Hanover outpacing Brunswick, Pender counties in creating high-paying jobs

By Adam Wagner | StarNews Staff

SOUTHEASTERN N.C. — In late November, AAIPharma Services Corp./Cambridge Major Laboratories, Inc., confirmed it will be building out its lab operations in Wilmington and investing in a new corporate headquarters.

The average wages for the 50 new employees at AAIPharma's new facility will be about \$77,000 per year, according to a release from the company.

AAIPharma's newest facility is the latest in a trend that, since 2007, has seen New Hanover County add more high value jobs while continuing to drive the wages for those jobs up faster than neighboring Brunswick and Pender counties, according to data from the N.C. Department of Commerce.

Some of the fields where New Hanover has seen substantial gains over its neighbors in either employment or wages include management, business, computer and math, and the medical and research professions.

"Being a little casual with the scaling, New Hanover County lost fewer manufacturing and construction jobs and gained more professional and business service jobs than the other two counties," Adam Jones, a University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) economist, wrote in an email.

Jones added that the presence of

Wage changes

Average annual wages have grown faster in New Hanover County than in Brunswick and Pender counties in recent years.

Years	New Hanover	Brunswick	Pender
2008	\$35,198	\$30,887	\$30,414
2009	36,895	31,274	29,512
2010	39,188	33,146	29,957
2011	40,197	34,331	30,726
2012	40,861	35,591	31,678
2013	41,156	34,511	32,681
2014	42,340	36,336	33,313
2015	42,431	36,255	31,889

Wilmington, an urban core, in New Hanover County meant faster growth could be expected there.

Companies such as AAIPharma, CastleBranch and N2 Publishing have chosen that

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SALARY

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urban core as the site for their new headquarters in recent years.

Business diversity helps

UNCW also has seen growth on its South College Road campus, with enrollment increasing from 11,840 total students in the 2007-8 school year to 14,570 at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year. Along with the growing number of students comes a growing number of jobs, with faculty increasing from 981 in fall 2007 to 1,156 in fall 2014, according to university data.

In all, the school employs 1,889 people, according to its human resources department.

But overall, employment in the educational field in New Hanover County has fallen in recent years because of cutbacks tied to last decade's recession and more recent governmental policy changes.

Scott Satterfield, the CEO of Wilmington Business Development, said he has anecdotally seen growth in the financial services and medical fields since the end of the recession. Still, it is the presence of any number of companies, from GE to PPD to Corning that, he said, has helped New Hanover County bounce back from the recession faster than its neighbors.

"You've got a great diverse sector here," he said, "that I think helps provide buoyancy in very turbulent waters."

It is typical for government-sector jobs to pay more in New Hanover County than in the other areas covered by the Cape Fear Council of Governments, including Brunswick, Columbus and Pender counties.

"There's people desperate and willing to work for less in the distressed areas," said Chris May, the council's executive director. "In the more prosperous areas, people aren't willing to take a cut."

To see salaries of public sector employees in Southeastern North Carolina, check out the StarNews' updated salary database at StarNewsOnline.com/salaries.

Medical/health care growth

In the medical field specifically, New Hanover Regional Medical Center is the largest employer in New Hanover County. According to data provided by the hospital, it employs 6,462 people between its New Hanover campus and the significantly smaller Pender Memorial Hospital. In addition, the hospital's Physician Group includes another 166 doctors and 64 jobs such as physician assistants and nurse practitioners.

The hospital's presence likely led to many doctors and medical specialists' offices springing up around the 17th Street corridor, leading to more high-paying jobs, said Roy Cordato, the vice president for research at the John Locke Foundation, a Raleigh-based conservative think tank.

"If you get a major employer or a major operation of any kind in a particular area, what surrounds it are other businesses and firms that service that industry or that can take advantage of this area that people know," he said.

The medical base is particularly important because that sector has seen substantial growth in wages since 2007, according to the N.C. Department of Commerce.

In New Hanover County, for instance, healthcare



The personal care industry has seen tremendous growth in recent years in Southeastern North Carolina — particularly in New Hanover County.

STARNEWS FILE PHOTOS



Wilmington-based CastleBranch intends to add hundreds of new jobs in the coming years as it develops and grows its operations off of Military Cutoff Road.



Acme Smoked Fish Corp. opened a processing plant that employs nearly 150 in the Pender County Commerce Park in February. It is one of the largest private employers in Pender County.

practitioners earned an average of \$60,854 in 2007 and \$69,229 in 2015. The field has also grown from 5,850 employees to 7,130 employees.

"The growth and the recovery that we're seeing here is bringing more people here and with the region and the accessibility to this area becoming better, people are coming here for their healthcare needs," Satterfield said.

Loss of manufacturing jobs

In neighboring Brunswick and Pender counties, though, the news isn't as positive. While both have seen wages rise, they haven't done so as rapidly as New Hanover's. Furthermore, while populations are continuing to grow in both counties, the workforce isn't growing as fast — although there have been a few bright spots, like Acme Smoked Fish in the Pender County Commerce Park.

This could be an indicator that the recovery from the recession isn't catching on as fast in rural areas as it is in urban centers like

Wilmington, said Patrick McHugh, an economist for the N.C. Justice Center, a progressive research group.

Between 2010 and 2014, for instance, Brunswick County grew 10.6 percent, from 107,431 residents to 118,836, according to U.S. Census estimates. Over that same period, the workforce — including both employed and unemployed — grew only 1.7 percent, from 46,521 to 47,307 people.

"The recovery that we've had in North Carolina has been predominantly an urban recovery," McHugh said. He added that North Carolina has recovered from the recession at about the same rate as the rest of the country, but has continued to add population — possibly leading to more idle could-be workers, even if they don't show up in the numbers.

What's damaging Brunswick County, in particular, is the loss of manufacturing jobs. In 2013, for instance, DAK Americas shuttered its Navassa plant. That led to the loss of 350 DAK jobs, along with 250 maintenance contractor jobs from Houston-based Mundy

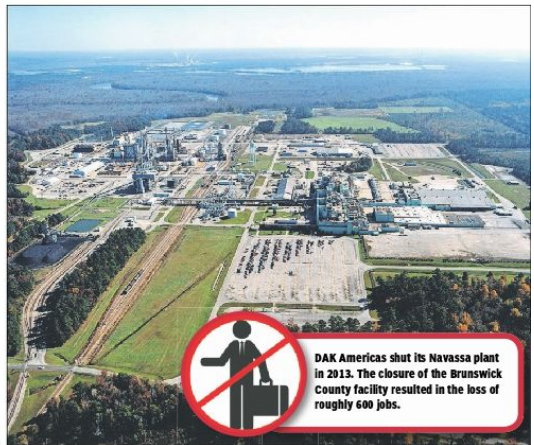
Looking for a job?

Between 2007 and 2015 New Hanover County's total employment rose slightly from 100,150 employees to 103,750, according to N.C. Department of Commerce data. Some of the employment categories that have seen the most change over that period are:

Category (2007 job total/2015 job total)	Percent change, 2007 - 2015
Healthcare (5,850/7,130)	22%
Personal care (1,630/2,910)	79%
Business/financial (3,000/3,930)	31%
Computer/math (1,170/1,870)	60%
Education (5,910/5,640)	-5%
Construction and extraction (6,070/4,590)	-24%

Source: N.C. Dept. of Commerce

GATEHOUSE MEDIA



DAK Americas shut its Navassa plant in 2013. The closure of the Brunswick County facility resulted in the loss of roughly 600 jobs.

Service Corp.

Bill Sue sat on the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners between 1994 and 2012. During that time, he said, the county's growth typically started in housing before trickling into other fields such as medicine.

Brunswick has seen some of that secondary kind of growth in recent years, with the number of medical practitioner employees spiking from 820 in 2007 to 2,090 in 2015, with average annual wages jumping from \$57,125 to \$71,052 over the

same period.

Still, the county would greatly benefit from another large manufacturing employer, Sue said.

"Right now," he said, "when our young people graduate from the community colleges and from high schools, the only job in the offering for them is a service job."

Near the end of Sue's time on the board, Brunswick County flirted with the possibility of bringing a Caterpillar or Continental Tire plant to the area — efforts that ultimately

fell short.

"If you want to work in Brunswick County and get a decent-paying job, you've got to work for Duke Energy or you've got to work at (Military Ocean Terminal) Sunny Point or at Archer Daniels Midland," Sue said. "Other than that, DuPont or DAK Americas, they're up and gone... You don't have any big employers around."

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