



Boeing a Big Deal in Battle Against State's Unemployment Woes

BY DAN MCCUE
PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOEING

By now, it's almost a cliché: Boeing's decision to land in South Carolina after months of debating where a second assembly plant for its 787 Dreamliner should be is a very big deal.

Not only did its decision to invest \$750 million in North Charleston, on a campus adjacent to Charleston International Airport, the biggest economic development deal in the state's history, but its promise to create thousands of jobs is rippling, not only throughout the Lowcountry, but into the Pee Dee, the Midlands and beyond.

"So far, about 99 percent of the people we've trained or are in the process of training to work at the plant are South Carolina residents, with 80 percent living within 30 miles of the facility, and another 20 percent coming from the Midlands and on up to Greenville," said Jim Maxon, Boeing project director for Ready SC, a division of the SC Technical College System.

"Going forward, I expect that to continue," he added. "I think we all agree this is a tremendous opportunity that will touch all South Carolinians in one way or another."

Although much has been made of the \$450 million in incentives South Carolina lawmakers bestowed on the aerospace giant last year to seal the deal, in reality, the course for Boeing's touching down in the state was set several years earlier, when Boeing established an international supply and manufacturing chain for the 787, the world's first passenger aircraft made largely of carbon-fiber composite material.

Two of its suppliers, Vought Aircraft Industries and a joint venture between Vought and Italy's Alenia Aeronautica established facilities in North Charleston. Then, last July, after several delays in

the 787 program – and with more than 800 orders for the plane already booked – Boeing upped its South Carolina ante by acquiring Vought's facility for \$580 million.

With that, and with media accounts of Boeing's prickly relationship with labor unions at its Seattle manufacturing facility, starting to proliferate, speculation abounded that the manufacturer might just be considering the state for a planned second assembly line that could get the passenger liner's delivery schedule back on track.

Somewhat surprisingly, as such speculation often comes to naught, this time the rumors proved true.

"Sometimes I felt like Boeing was the worst kept secret in the world because there were so many people working really hard on the project," said Stephanie Eames, one member of a team of Nexsen Pruet attorneys who worked on the deal.

"Fortunately, the agreement was made before word of it got out, and I think that speaks well to the economic development effort that brought them here," she said. "A breach of confidentiality or trust can kill a deal."

"In any situation like this, it's to our benefit to keep our heads down and get our respective jobs done, and that really is the backstory to the Boeing announcement," Eames continued. "Through the process – and again, there were many, many people involved – they came to know us as trustworthy and came to know who the people were that they could call on and rely on."

Eames admitted it was fun to have such a really big secret for awhile.

"I doubt I'll be so lucky as to see something that big again," she said.

Candy Eslinger, a spokesperson for Boeing Charleston, said the new plant will max out at about 584,000-square-feet, and will include several "green features." Production of the first Dreamliners at the facility is scheduled to start in 2011, with as many as three completed 787s a month taking flight from Charleston en route to service with their respective airlines the following year.

It's a timeline that's put Maxon and his trainers squarely on center stage. But one was hard-pressed to sense any pressure as Maxon recently lead a tour of Boeing's new employee training center at Trident Technical College.

"Well, we've been involved in this project since 2006, when Vought and the joint venture, Global Aeronautica began building fuselage sections for the 787 here, so I guess you could say it's not that we're doing something that's totally new to us It's just that our role has evolved over time," he said. "In essence, our scope of work is changing as the scope of work at the Boeing campus near the airport changes."

As he spoke, SC Ready had already provided training to 1,700 Vought/Global/Boeing workers, who continuing make fuselage sections that are being flown to Seattle for final assembly in 787s until the new assembly line is up and running.

Maxon then described the somewhat daunting Team Charleston Application Process. The basic requirements for those interested in applying for a position as an assembler or fabricator area are a minimum of one year manufacturing experience and a high school diploma. Applicants can get a waiver of the experience requirement by attending a pre-manufacturing or aircraft assembly technology course at Trident Technical College.

From there, qualified applicants can then apply for a seat in pre-requisite training for the assembler/fabricator position at a local Employment Security Commission One Stop office or online at www.sctechjobs.com.

If their application is selected, the applicant will then move on to WorkKeys training, followed by an additional 32 hours of unpaid mandatory pre-hire training overseen by SC Ready.

Then, and only then can they actually apply for the position at either www.Boeing.com or www.careerbuilder.com.

Applicants for all other positions at the plant can proceed directly to the Boeing or Careerbuilder Web sites.

While Boeing's new assembly facility has been hailed as a mammoth job generator by lawmakers and economic developers alike, Maxon said all involved in the job training process are striving not to create any false hopes.

"We've already got 3,000 to 4,000 people who are in the pipeline, with 1,400 who have met the criteria of the interview process, and are waiting for a place in a class," he said. "And even if you're already in line, moving up in the process will take a little time. We're filling class spaces on a first come, first serve basis. As one group moves through the training, we'll slot another one in.

Maxon said he intends to have 18 classes of applicants move through the school between now and the opening of the assembly plant next winter.

Seeing the dazed looked on his visitor's face as he talked of the training regime and the numbers involved, Maxon smiled.

"I guess what I'm saying is you can't expect to apply for a job at Boeing and expect to be hired and working tomorrow. There's going to be a wait, and the timing of your training is entirely dependent on your place in line."

Maxon said he too was part of the group of people who knew something was up in regard to Boeing last year, but the information he was privy to was very preliminary.

"When we learned that it was going to be an assembly plant, I think the first thing people around here realized was that we had a significant deficiency in lab space," he said.



How You Can be a Part of the New Boeing Facility



787 DREAMLINER™

Team Charleston
Application Process

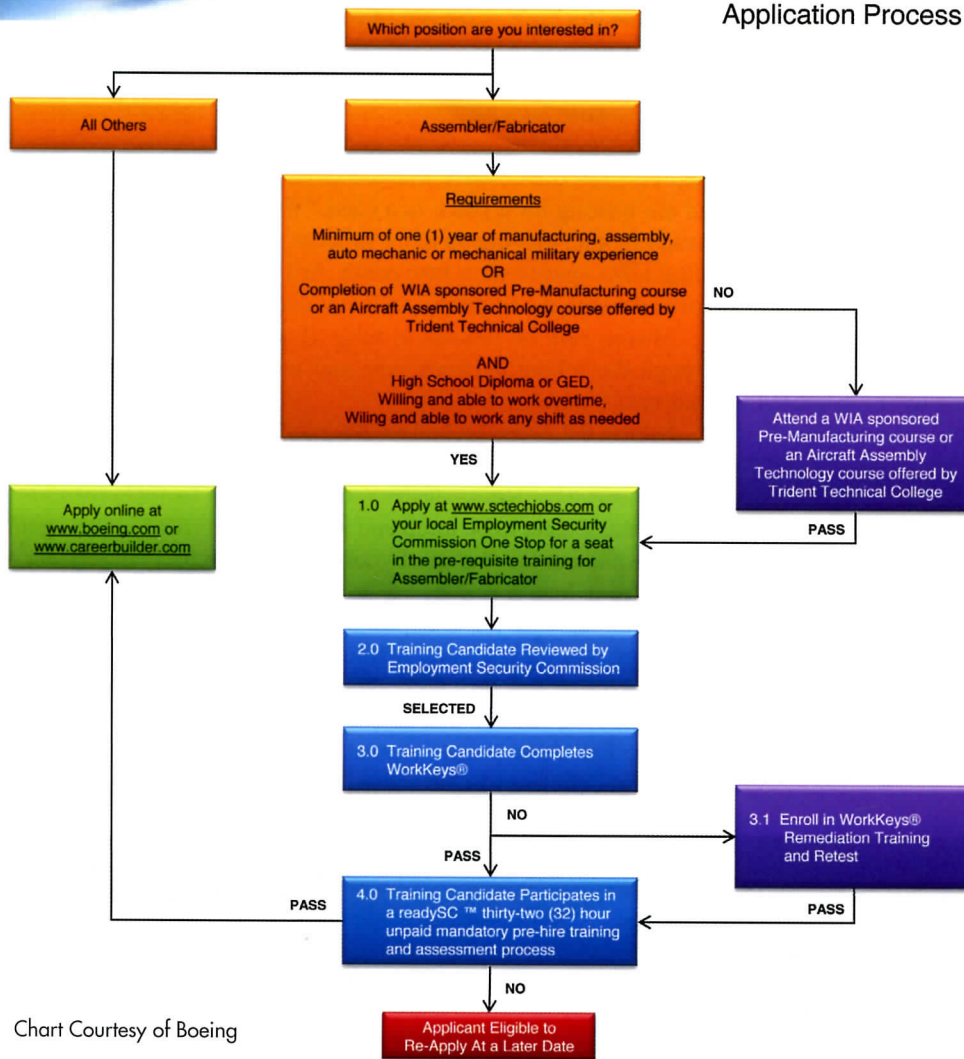


Chart Courtesy of Boeing

The original training facility at Trident Tech could accommodate only 20 people. In addition to classrooms, the new training facility, which is housed in the same building as the Trident Tech student bookstore, has 120 work stations.

Maxon said the state's long history of a home to the U.S. military proved a huge benefit, as 95 percent of the training program's instructors are former military personnel, "who understand the discipline that's required of an enterprise like this, the exacting nature of what's required of their students, and have a great working knowledge of aerospace technology."

"In all, among our trainers, I think we have a total of 500 years of aerospace experience," he said.

Still, after the deal to bring the assembly plant here was done, Boeing sent its experts to Charleston to bring the trainers up to speed on the 787 and its innovations.

"I think one of the nice, and frankly, important things that's happened is (that) first, Boeing bought out Vought and then decided to expand its presence here. (The outcome of that) is that the lines of communication have gotten much shorter," Maxon said.

"Previously, we had to deal with a third party, whether it be Vought or Global Aeronautics, and as in any situation, communication can be slowed when an intermediary is involved," he said. "Since announcing the assembly plant last year, Boeing has been very hands-on and the material we're teaching from is all Boeing proprietary materials."

"I mean, the training has to be rigorous and comply with their very strict standards," Maxon said with emphasis. "After all, at the end of the day, it's not jobs we're talking about, but passenger aircraft and the safety of the flying public."

Leading his visitor through the training facility, past a large sign that outlines one of Boeing's manufacturing philosophies - sort, simplify, sweep, standardize, and self-discipline—and into a spotless room dominated by two large aircraft sections and areas set aside for the teaching of specific manufacturing disciplines.

"It's all about exactness, attention to detail, and maintaining a clean work environment" Maxon said as he walked past a class receiving a lesson in fiber optics. "Human craftsmanship and automation, everything state of the art."

"After all no one wants one of these planes to take off with a fastener banging around under its skin," he said.

After leading the brief tour, Maxon opined, "It's really something. It's really something South Carolinians can be proud of."

Nelson Mullin attorney Bobby Pearce, incoming chairman of the board of the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce, offered his perspective on Boeing's importance to the Lowcountry and the state as a whole.

"To me, it's tantamount to the Good Housekeeping seal of approval," he said. "Here you have a company with an international profile to our region for the first time, and I think that's going to increase the number of very large international companies that give the state and the Lowcountry a serious look.

"Every time a delegation arrives to pick up a 787 - because these companies don't just send a pilot, they send an entire delegation - the economic development community is going to have an opportunity to show them all we have to offer."

Boeing building the Charleston plant invites suppliers to the airline-building giant also to set up shop in the area. Recently, even Boeing announced it plans to further invest in the Palmetto State by building a plant for the fabrication and assembly of airplane interior parts to supply the 787 Dreamliner final assembly and delivery site. As of press time, the company was reviewing potential sites for the new airplane interiors facility. This is the type of snowball effect on job production and economic development that



“Recognizing the superior quality of the products and services provided by our Interiors Responsibility Center in Everett, Boeing believes this extension is an important step in ensuring that we maintain a high level of consistency and quality in our production system,” said Conner. “In the long term, we are strengthening our position in the aerospace market and ensuring that we remain competitive as a company.”

Located within the Boeing Everett complex, the Interiors Responsibility Center is a focused area of excellence for the design, manufacture, assembly and integration of a wide range of interior systems for production, aftermarket and spares for Boeing commercial jets.

Gary Frederick, senior vice president for development for Hillwood Investment Properties, which is building a huge distribution center complex near Jeddburg, a few miles up the road from the new Boeing fa-

cility, says the Boeing investment is “probably the pinnacle economic event for the region.

“I mean, think about it, Boeing could have literally gone anywhere in the world and said, ‘we’re interested in building a new assembly plant,’ and the economic development community there would have rolled out the red carpet and given them anything they wanted... and yet they chose Charleston, they chose South Carolina” he said.

Frederick said he suspects the reasons for Boeing’s choice are that Charleston is a “stable community with a stable workforce.”

“In any business where a major, major decision is to be made, you look to eliminate risk,” he said. “I think that Boeing did that by choosing us, and I think it’s just further proof that South Carolina and its business environment are world class.”

“By expanding Boeing’s footprint in South Carolina, we enhance our existing foundation with Boeing Charleston and further contribute to the growth of aerospace in the region,” said Ray Conner, vice president and general manager, Supply Chain Management and Operations, Boeing Commercial Airplanes.

The Boeing Fabrication Interiors South Carolina team will manufacture 787 interior parts, including stow bins, closets, partitions, class dividers, floor-mounted stow bins used by flight attendants, overhead flight-crew rests, overhead flight attendant crew rests, video-control stations and attendant modules.

