

## Improving living conditions in Halifax County

*By Roger Bell  
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WELDON — The Halifax Horizon business group, a cooperative venture of local business and government leaders dedicated to improving the living conditions in Halifax County, held its sixth annual meeting at the Chockoyotte Country Club in Weldon Wednesday evening.



Billy Ray Hall, President, NC Rural Center, addresses Horizons Members

The group heard good news from the night's speakers. Halifax County Commissioner Gene Minton expressed his feeling the Halifax Horizon was "the most progressive group working together in North Carolina. We have a corporate park really well positioned, and the new airport is a state-of-the-art gem." Minton also characterized The Roanoke Rapids Theatre as "a tremendous opportunity for us." He finished his remarks by announcing the group was working on "projects worth \$60 million in investments and 710 new jobs in Halifax County."

The Halifax Horizon President Grady "Phil" Hux, brought more good news concerning tourism. "Halifax County had the ninth greatest increase for tourism in all of North Carolina."

The group's main attraction was keynote speaker Billy Ray Hall, president of the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center. Hall described the center's purpose, "The General Assembly provides dollars, you provide economic development opportunity and we provide public support."

Hall's speech centered on the Halifax Horizon's motto: "Working together works." Hall applauded the group for raising more than \$500,000 for the community in its five previous years, then got into the theme of economic development.

"Existing business is the most important business in North Carolina," Hall asserted. "For every job lost we have to find two ... one for the unemployed guy and the new one."

Hall continued to expand on the principles of sound economy building for rural development. "One of the building blocks is physical infrastructure. Another is civic infrastructure. Third is workforce development; if you don't have a willing and able workforce how will they grow their business in your county? Fourth is business recruiting and growing existing businesses."

Hall then pointed out one way Halifax Horizons and the center have lived the idea of "working together works." In addition, he pointed out how the example illustrated one of the building blocks.

"Have we been working together? We have a contract with all seven towns to provide water and sewer for five million dollars. Is that physical infrastructure?" The group listened intently as Hall shifted his speech's focus to the future. He began by discussing the Building Re-Use Program.

“If you have a job to fill a building, we will provide money to renovate the building at \$12,000 a job.”

Hall urged the business and government leaders to push for that program by applying for the grant money available. Hall continued to discuss the Center’s future programs.

Hall concluded his speech by pointing out the center’s help does not come with interference attached. “Halifax County is your county. We come to the table as a less than 50 percent partner. We will not tell you what to do.”

The Halifax Horizons ended with an award presentation as Scott Aman won the group’s prestigious Working Together Works award.