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FEATURED

## McDowell stone company awarded \$150,000 state grant for renovation

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PHOTOS SUBMITTED

McDowell County was awarded the grant to support the renovation of a large blue metal building at 7274 U.S. 221 North. This building is used by Buechel Stone, a family-owned fabricator of natural stones for the commercial and residential markets. The project is expected to create 12 new jobs with an investment of \$1.39 million by the company. In this photo, employee Chad Stevens is working at the Woodlawn facility and he's been one of the first employees since Buechel Stone started operating here since January 2017.

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A small industry in northern McDowell County that specializes in stone for commercial and residential construction recently received a \$150,000 grant from the N.C. Department of Commerce. With this money, the company plans to renovate its building and create 12 new jobs.

On Thursday, April 18, the N.C. Department of Commerce announced a North Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority grant of \$150,000 was approved for the renovation of an existing building in the Woodlawn community of McDowell.

In the existing building category of grants, McDowell County was awarded the grant to support the renovation of a large blue metal building at 7274 U.S. 221 North. This building is used by Buechel Stone, a family-owned fabricator of natural stones for the commercial and residential markets. The project is expected to create 12 new jobs with an investment of \$1.39 million by the company, according to a news release from the North Carolina Department of Commerce.

Founded in 1964 in Wisconsin, Buechel Stone has operated its facility in McDowell County since January 2017. Buechel Stone Corp. later purchased the assets of Blue Ridge Mountain Stone in Marion. Blue Ridge Mountain Stone was Buechel Stone's main vendor for raw materials at production facility. The purchase includes all assets,

leases, and customer lists that were maintained by Blue Ridge Mountain Stone and will result in several new quarries to Buechel Stone's quarrying operation, according to a news release on the company's Website.

"We knew some of the risks that came with relying on a third party to supply our raw material needs," said Scott Buechel, president of Buechel Stone. "When we opened our production site [(at Marion in 2017), it was most important to start the process in order to get our new (building stone veneer) products out to the market. When the owners of Blue Ridge approached us about purchasing the business, we knew it was the best way to show our commitment to the customers that have been promoting our current products – Barnwood Blue, Black Frost, Highland Scotch, and Spalted Oak. It was also important that we solidify our commitment to the community of Marion."

The company now has two locations in Marion and is seeking to upgrade the building in Woodlawn so the two locations can be brought under one roof, according to Mike Buechel, chief operating officer and owner.

"We are very grateful for McDowell County and the state of North Carolina offering us a grant," said Mike Buechel to The McDowell News. "Currently we are working at two different locations in Marion. We believe in having a work environment that is great for all our employees (who we refer to as Rockstars). In our current environment, much of the work is done outside and in the elements. It is our intention to get our Rockstars inside so they are not dealing with the elements, and need to update the building to make this happen. We are consolidating to one location and are purchasing one of our leased locations along with 10 acres to have a permanent stake in the city of Marion and the state of North Carolina."

Mike Buechel added the consolidation to one location means that several items in the building need to be updated. It will require additional overhead doors, an update to the power system, a larger break room and office space, an increase in restrooms and plumbing updates.

"In total, before we add any additional equipment this will cost about \$300,000," said Mike Buechel to The McDowell News. "The grant we received is based on the number of additional new jobs we hire within a two year period with family-sustaining wages."

The grant can only be used to update the building to fit our long-term needs. It must be something related to the building's function, not something like equipment.

“As an employer – we greatly value our workforce and work hard to make coming to work each day enjoyable. We offer things like extreme anniversary gifts for every five year anniversary, paid time to help non-profits, and a very favorable insurance program, just to name a few of our benefits.”

Buechel Stone will stay in the first building that is being leased at 7274 U.S. 221 North with all production and processing happening at this location.

“We are actively hiring, and actually had people starting this week so we can start training and have more people ready,” said Mike Buechel on Wednesday. “We hope to have the building updated and all operations moved by sometime in June barring any unseen problems.”

Last month, the McDowell County Commissioners held a public hearing about the expansion of this existing small company, which was not specifically named during the hearing.

In March, the commissioners met with Chuck Abernathy, the executive director of the McDowell Economic Development Association (MEDA). Abernathy led the discussion during the public hearing about the latest economic development project.

Abernathy at the time said it was only a small existing manufacturing company that has been in business since 1964 in another state. He said the firm employs approximately 30 people in McDowell County and will expand its operations to include 12 more employees.

An investment of more than \$850,000 will occur in a building that the company is currently leasing and will later purchase. This company will pay wages greater than the county average manufacturing wage and health insurance will be offered, said Abernathy in March.

This company is seeking approximately \$150,000 in state assistance for the upgrades to the building, which will cost a total of \$300,000. The company and the county must match this \$150,000 in state money dollar for dollar. The company will pay 45 percent, or \$142,500 of the project's cost and the county will pay 5 percent, or \$7,500. After closing the public hearing, the commissioners approved moving forward with this project during their March meeting.

Also on Thursday, April 18, the North Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA) approved 17 grant requests to local governments totaling \$7,068,625. The requests include commitments to create a total of 869 jobs, 623 of which were previously announced. The public investment in these projects will attract more than \$96.8 million in private investment, according to the news release.

“Bringing opportunity and prosperity to all parts of North Carolina requires that we make smart investments in infrastructure in order to put rural communities in position to succeed,” state Commerce Secretary Anthony Copeland said. “Rural Infrastructure Authority grants continue to be essential tools for economic development and the creation of good jobs.”

The North Carolina Department of Commerce's team of rural economic development professionals supports the RIA's work. RIA members review and approve funding requests from local communities. Funding comes from a variety of specialized grant and loan programs offered and managed by N.C. Commerce's Rural Economic Development Division, led by Assistant Secretary for Rural Development Kenny Flowers. Grants can support a variety of activities, including infrastructure development, building renovation, expansion and demolition, and site improvements.

“The projects approved for grants today will help rural North Carolina attract jobs, support business growth and prepare sites for future development,” said Assistant Secretary Flowers. “The Rural Economic Development Division at Commerce and the Rural Infrastructure Authority work closely with rural community leaders to strengthen their economies and encourage investment.”

Six other grants were announced in the existing building category:

- **Burke County:** A \$312,000 grant will support the expansion of a building in Hildebran occupied by Marves Industries, a manufacturer of non-woven fabrics, acoustical materials, felt and composite materials. The company plans to add 10,000 square feet to the facility, while creating 25 jobs and investing \$1,865,315 in this project.
- **Granville County:** A \$287,500 grant will support the renovation of a 165,000-square-foot building in Oxford occupied by Dill Air Controls Products, which manufactures over 1,000 different products for various markets and applications, including valves and gauges. The project is expected to create 23 jobs with an investment of \$1,154,059 by the company.
- **City of Statesville (Iredell County):** A \$300,000 grant will support the renovation of a 343,184-square-foot building occupied by Badger Sportswear, a provider of team uniforms and performance athletic wear. The company plans to create 82 jobs and invest \$3,693,802 in this project, which consolidates its operations from two other states into the Statesville facility.
- **City of Archdale (Randolph County):** A \$135,000 grant will support the renovation of a 58,101-square-foot building occupied by Aeolus Filter, which manufactures filtration products, primarily for the HVAC industry. The company plans to create 11 jobs and invest \$1,460,000 in the project.
- **City of Archdale (Randolph County):** A \$65,000 grant will support the renovation of a 18,434-square-foot building occupied by CovenantMade, a manufacturer of custom cabinets for mid-to-high-end residential markets. This project is expected to create 11 jobs with an investment of \$178,000 by the company.

- Richmond County: A \$122,000 grant will support the renovation of a 50,000-square-foot building in Hamlet occupied by Superior Plastics Extrusion Company, Inc., known as Impact Plastics, a custom sheet extrusion company that specializes in thin gauge extruded plastic sheet and roil stock for applications in the food, medical, cosmetic, and automotive industries. The company plans to create 13 jobs and invest \$5,228,000 in the project.

The Building Reuse Program provides grants to local governments to renovate vacant buildings, renovate and/or expand buildings occupied by existing North Carolina companies, and renovate, expand or construct health care facilities that will lead to the creation of new jobs in Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties and in rural census tracts of Tier 3 counties, according to the news release from the N.C. Department of Commerce.