

HICKORY METRO CONVENTION CENTER

\$18 million renovation



COURTESY OF MANDY HILDEBRAND

Attendees to the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services Conference used the renovated spaces for large group meetings. The space can be divided into four separate rooms.

First large conference held at renovated convention center

BILLY CHAPMAN
wchapman@hickoryrecord.com

Hickory Metro Convention Center and Visitors' Bureau CEO Mandy Hildebrand is a fervent supporter of her hometown.

"To me this (Hickory) is a destination," Hildebrand said. "This is the Atlantic Ocean, this is the Panthers' stadium, this is Grandfather Mountain, because this is a destination and a lot of people who came way before me saw Hickory as being a meeting-destination place."

The idea of Hickory as a business destination was one of the catalysts for modernizing and expanding the Hickory Metro Convention Center in 2023.

After less than 18 months, most of the construction and renovations at the convention center are complete.

The North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services held the first large conference in the new and renovated spaces in early August.

The conference brought around 1,100 attendees to the convention center.

Sharnese Ransome, director of the as-

sociation, said the organization has come to Hickory for many of the past 15 years. She was impressed with the renovations and new space.

"They've built a really good campus here that serves our needs," Ransome said. "Hickory treats us extraordinarily well."

New construction at the center added 46,194 square feet of space. The additional space included a 35,000-square-foot multipurpose sports complex with 30-foot ceilings. The space has hardwood floors and will soon be painted for volleyball, basketball and pickleball.

Ransome said the conference used the space for setting up food stations during one of the larger sessions.

Hildebrand said one new event taking place in the multipurpose space is a cheerleading competition. She said the event has been held in other locations but is coming to Hickory.

The website for Midwest Cheer and Dance says the 2025 Carolina Classic will be in Hickory in March.

The company said they expect to have 75

to 100 teams for the competition.

Another addition is a 2,500-square-foot pre-function space that Hildebrand said will highlight the furniture manufacturing and hospitality industry in the area. The space has large windows and an entrance that leads to an outdoor patio. Attached to the space is a separate conference room for in-person meetings, teleconferencing or other needs.

Updates to existing spaces

Renovations of the six Catawba meeting rooms were among the more substantial updates to the existing space.

Two permanent rooms of about 1,000 square feet were updated with new lights and carpet. Four meeting rooms were updated with moveable walls so the space can be converted into one large room or up to four separate rooms.

Drop ceilings were added to Catawba Rooms 3 through 6 to improve acoustics.

New lighting, audio equipment, video

Please see **METRO**, Page A6

Metro

From A1

throughout the building to improve existing spaces. New screens in hallways were added to help visitors find meeting rooms and navigate the building.

One room in the existing space was also modified to allow for teleconferencing.

The interior of the convention center was not the only part of the property that received updates.

An exterior addition is an extended canopy from the parking deck to the north entrance. Hildebrand said that project is still being completed but should be finished in the next few months.

A new roof was also added to the existing part of the convention center in October 2023.

The need for lodging

New construction and renovations at the convention center were funded primarily by hotel taxes from Conover and Hickory.

Currently, there are six hotels and motels within a 15-minute walk of the convention center. Two new hotels, Home2 Suites and TownePlace Suites, are under construction. The hotels will be close to the convention center and add 190 rooms.

Ransome said the new



BILLY CHAPMAN, RECORD

A new seating area outside meetings rooms features bench seating made by Catawba Valley Community College Furniture Academy participants. Clint McCorkle, Mark Jordan and Gary Muller of CVCC converse while seated in the new area.

hotels will be a welcome addition to the area around the convention center.

"We've had people stay as far as 30 miles away, and if we can bring them onsite, on the campus, that's a really great thing," Ransome said.

Hildebrand said she is hopeful the expanded convention center will draw more accommodations in the future.

"I think we'll be able to draw even larger events when we have more hotels in the area, not just beside us, but throughout the county," Hildebrand said.

Even before the hotels are built, the convention center is already drawing new events. Besides the cheerleading competition, the Visit North Carolina Tourism

Conference will take place at the convention center in April 2025. The event is expected to bring 500 to 1,000 tourism professionals to the area.

Hildebrand said she expects the larger and updated convention center will attract more events previously not

held in the area.

Ransome said her organization plans to hold its conference in Hickory again next year.

Billy Chapman is a reporter with the Hickory Daily Record. wchapman@hickoryrecord.com

Upcoming public events at the Hickory Metro Convention Center

Interested in checking out the renovations? The following events are coming up at the convention center:

Inside Pitch Toy Show: August 17

Mountain View Karate Tournament: August 23-24

Hickory Women's Expo: August 24-25

Scam Jam (must register with the Western Piedmont Council of Governments) : August 29

C&E Gun and Knife Show: September 7-8

For more information about these events, visit visithickorymetro.com/convention-center/convention-calendar.

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