Confluence Watersports Case Study
Boat builder forges public/private partnerships for workforce training and outdoor recreation development

Greenville, S.C. – Confluence Watersports is one of the world’s largest manufacturers of kayaks, canoes and paddlesports accessories. You probably know them better through their famous brands like Wilderness Systems, Perception, Dagger, Wave SportMad River Canoe, Adventure Technology and Bomber Gear.

Confluence is also one of the industry’s best examples of a company capitalizing on the wave of the growing outdoor recreation economy. Business is booming, causing it to bring previously outsourced supplier jobs back to the U.S., as well as forge partnerships with state government and colleges to keep its workforce refreshed with good, trained talent.

Its growth is injecting wealth and commerce into the local Greenville economy as well. The company recently expanded into a new 300,000 square foot facility, with a commitment to invest up to $15 million in construction and capital expenditures over the next few years, all while adding at least 75 new jobs to its current workforce of 425 employees.

While Confluence had options to relocate elsewhere, the company chose to remain in the Greenville area for its low cost of living, outdoor lifestyle advantages and its proximity to technical schools, according to Sue Rechner, CEO.

“We’ve done a lot of relationship-building and recruiting with local technical schools like Greenville Tech and state universities like
Clemson," she said. “We want to develop a stable of skilled talent who can rise into future job positions as they become available.”

As the ninth largest rotational injection molding manufacturer in the U.S., Confluence continuously faces engineering challenges that require skilled help and training. To that end, Confluence works with local schools on new product development and problem-solving projects. It is also working with the state in developing mentoring programs to train people in what Rechner calls the “complex art of roto molding boats.”

Given global economic changes, Confluence’s growth is allowing it to “onshore” much of its supply chain again, with the company now turning to U.S. injection molding, fastener and “cut-and-sew” manufacturing partners.

“We build premium products, so we have to be particular and methodical about our supply chain,” Rechner said. “We’re getting great quality from local suppliers, most of which are in the South and North Carolina region. As a result, our onshoring efforts are enabling them to expand their workforce.”

This concentration of manufacturing expertise combined with Greenville’s vibrant cultural and outdoor resources has enabled Confluence to attract and retain quality employees. The city’s revitalization stems from sound planning principles and more than 30 years of public-private partnerships, like those Confluence has forged with local government agencies. Greenville was recently named one of “America’s Best Downtowns” in Forbes. Located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and on the banks of the Reedy River, the area offers numerous opportunities to live, work and play year-round.

Beyond jobs and commerce, Confluence contributes to Greenville’s revitalization by supporting many local non-profit organizations and events. The company also incents its employees to spend five days a year in waterway cleanup or any other reclamation efforts that drive outdoor recreation.

“We want to help build the infrastructure that gives people access to places to recreate. It’s been proven over and over again that when you create or clean up areas to recreate, it has a positive economic and cultural spillover into the community. Greenville is the perfect example,” Rechner said.