Surry County, North Carolina currently has an unemployment rate of 12.3 percent, a poverty rate of 17.5 percent, and a disability rate of 20 percent. As the people of this community attempt to enter the workforce anew, they often encounter fears and frustrations due to a lack of the technological skills that are required today in so many career fields and, in many cases, in even discovering opportunities and applying for job openings. Public computer centers are a means of developing these skills. These centers can provide training in how to use a computer and how to find web-based resources. They can provide access to occupational training courses, educational support, and assistance with resume writing. They provide a means for conducting job searches for those who might not otherwise have such access. These centers can help people find jobs while engendering a sense of preparedness and well-being. Local community colleges provide invaluable assistance to computer center projects because they understand, first-hand, the needs of such centers. With management from Surry Community College, these two centers will operate at new workforce development centers in the towns of Elkin and Pilot Mountain on opposite ends of a county that is largely traversed on two-lane roads. Locating the centers in these two towns will allow this program to reach a maximum number of vulnerable populations: the unemployed, disabled, those lacking a high school diploma, and others who require broadband access. Other workforce development activities at the center will facilitate training and services of the computer centers. The main areas served will be the towns of Elkin and Pilot Mountain and the areas immediately surrounding them. For Pilot Mountain these include areas of eastern Surry County and western Stokes County, with a population of 14,972 over 4 zip codes. For Elkin these include western Surry County and parts of eastern Wilkes and northwest Yadkin counties, with a population of 27,178 over 5 zip code areas. The total population served is 42,150 people. Surry County is 51.3 percent female. It is 85.7 percent white, 9 percent Hispanic, and 4.1 percent African-American, with American Indians and Asian-Americans comprising the other 1 percent. The population is largely between the ages of 18 and 65. Only two out of three residents have a high school diploma, while only 12 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Almost one in five residents has some manner of disability. The 2000 median household income was $33,046, and over 17 percent of the population lives in poverty. We estimate that 120 people per weekday will utilize the two public computer centers to access broadband Internet and associated web-based educational programs. This program will be implemented and achieve its intended results because of the professional staff involvement of Surry Community College, including Ray Hall, coordinator/instructor of computer skills training and continuing education; Greg Smith, director of occupational extension and special projects; Nate Nixon, the IT team's chief technology officer; Dr. Candace Holder, director of distance education; and Dr. George Sappenfield, vice
president of corporate and continuing education. The commitment of these administrators will ensure
that equipment and programs that suit the needs of the public will be provided, as will the involvement
of local government leaders such as Leslie Schlender, economic development officer for the Town of
Elkin, and Pilot Mountain Town Manager Blair Knox. Surry Community College will act as manager and
operator of the computing centers and college staff will oversee day-to-day operations. The Northwest
Piedmont Council of Governments will provide support for re-employment and skill development.
Overall, this collaborative relationship between the community college and the towns of Elkin and Pilot
Mountain will serve to enhance the effectiveness of Surry Community College's on-campus workforce
development centers, as well as its other satellite computing centers in Mount Airy and Yadkinville. This
strategy brings the opportunity for educational and occupational advancement and workforce-
development support directly to the heart of a struggling community. The project will support
individuals who otherwise would not be able to access online services and assists in rehabilitating
abandoned buildings in small towns. These structures are being upfitted for re-use in the new-economy
infrastructure through partnerships between local governments, the local community college, and state
and federal aid.