

Community-Based Adjustment to Textile Plant Closure and Downsizing

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Session 2

Presentation: “A Short History of Stonecutter Mills and Spindale, North Carolina”,
Timothy Barth and Duncan Murrell

Discussants: Pat Everhart, Director of Job Training and Development Center, Davidson
County
Rick Carlisle, Managing Partner, Dogwood Equity

Pat Everhart took as her theme that “we are all in transition”; those dislocated workers from textile firms are just the most visible. In Davidson County the economic base has moved from 68 percent to 34 percent over the last 10 years, and this has brought about substantial dislocation.

Unfortunately, those laid off don’t uniformly see this. Only 20 percent of those laid off go into training programs. This, from a population of dislocated workers with 76 percent performing at below 9th grade level and 38 percent below 6th grade level. Each family faces a transition, but also a choice: does it meet its long-term need, or does it do what is necessary to stabilize the family in the short run. Many families can’t afford to do both.

The county has been active in creating synergies among the three “players” in a dislocation: the company, the family, and the community. This is the most challenging part of her job.

Rick Carlisle commended the paper to all readers as an important case study. He cited three features: the speed with which downsizing had devastated the town, the sustained downward spiral in town revenues that has hamstrung efforts to provide town services, and the statement of the question of how to rebuild the town.

He noted the similarity of this story with the recession and dislocation that gripped the Midwestern states in the 1970s as the steel mills closed. There are in effect two types of problems caused by such closures: the immediate, short run problems of assistance, and the long-term problem of regional reinvention. These latter problems are not addressed in the current rapid-response framework, but are critical to economic development.