

Moore County lands parachute company to power its economic growth

When Ballistic Recovery Systems (BRS) sought a location near a military installation with access to East Coast markets and state-of-the-art textile science research, the choice was clear — Moore County.

Only 35 minutes from Fort Bragg and an hour from Raleigh, Moore County is the perfect location for a company such as BRS.

St. Paul, Minn.-based BRS makes whole-aircraft parachute systems for certified aircraft, ultralight planes and Light Sport Aircraft. Unlike personal parachutes, which slow an individual's descent, BRS parachutes slow the descent of the entire aircraft. If an aircraft loses control for any reason, the pilot can pull a lever, release the parachute, and bring the entire aircraft down safely. While this system can prevent damage to the aircraft itself, the real goal is to save the lives of pilots and passengers.

"We can't guarantee the aircraft will survive totally intact; that depends on the circumstances of the landing," says Gary Moore, vice president of sales and marketing. "We're here to save lives, not airplanes. However, in most circumstances, the plane will only be lightly damaged."

BRS has delivered more than 27,000 parachute systems to aircraft owners worldwide, and has saved a confirmed 208 lives.

"We are the only manufacturer of this type in the country, and there are only a few in the world — in the Czech Republic and Ukraine — and they are not as large as us," Moore says.

The company currently makes parachutes suitable for 3,400-pound aircraft (four-passenger Cessnas or Cirrus), and is working toward parachutes for 7,500-pound aircraft, such as single-engine personal jets that carry four to six passengers and a pilot.

"If a single engine fails, you have no choice but to glide or crash, and gliding is still not a great option," Moore said.

This \$9.2-million company is clearly on the ascent. In 1993, after seven years and \$1.5 million in research, BRS was granted the first FAA approval to install a parachute on a certified aircraft, the Cessna 150/152 aircraft.

Cirrus Designs of Duluth, Minn., makers of the No. 1 selling Single Engine Aircraft, and Flight Design GmbH of Germany, makers of the No. 1 selling Light Sports Aircraft, both use BRS systems as a standard component on their aircraft.

The company has also diversified by making high-quality reflective vests for police forces, emergency responders and military units.

The company is now poised to enter the potentially lucrative arena of military work, and that is where the Pinebluff facility in Moore County fits in.

Currently the company's cut-and-sew work is done in Mexico, but to obtain Department of Defense contracts, all equipment must be manufactured in the United States.

The company's approximately 36,000-square-foot Pinebluff facility plans to hire between 30-35 people in the next six months.

"If we get a major contract, we could ramp up quickly," Moore said. "With that size space, we could hire 100-150 people easily if we needed to."

The main reason Pinebluff was selected was its proximity to Fort Bragg, but that is not the only reason.

"I know there is a lot of textile research being done in the area, and it will be nice to tap into that at some point," Moore said. "There are also inexpensive property rates and workers who are skilled in textile work. You can't find people in other parts of the country with those labor rates who have such skills."



"The location also gives us good proximity to raw materials suppliers (of textile fabrics) in Virginia and North Carolina."

BRS is developing two innovative product lines for military use. PASSIVE (Parachute Assisted Safety System for Internal Vehicle Emergencies) is designed for unmanned aircraft that transport expensive equipment and supplies. PASSIVE allows automated systems within the planes, or operators on the ground, to deploy the parachute in the event the aircraft loses control at certain altitudes — and thereby save the very expensive sensor payload on board such vehicles.

MAVERICK is designed to improve the safety of military flight training aircraft, since they usually do not have ejection seats.

BRS also is a perfect fit for Moore County's economic development goals: encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting small and mid-sized companies. Most new businesses in Moore County employ between 10 and 100 employees. ■

Top Employers in Moore County

Company	Product/Service	Employees
FirstHealth of the Carolinas, Inc.	Health care/hospital	2,850
Moore County Schools	Public education	1,828
Pinehurst Resorts	Hotel and resort	1,300
County of Moore	Government	650
Sandhills Community College	Community college	250-500
Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.	Mass retail	250-500
Lee Electrical Construction, Inc.	Construction	250-500
Gulistan Carpet	Carpet manufacturing	250-500
St. Joseph of the Pines	Senior living, health care	250-500
Pinehurst Surgical	Health care	250-500

Source: Employment Security Commission — Labor Market Statistics