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TOP STORY

SRNS CEO highlights workforce recruitment efforts in Aiken

By Colin Demarest cdemarest@aikenstandard.com Jan 5, 2018 Updated Jan 5, 2018



Stuart MacVean, president and CEO of Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, gave a worker retention lecture to the Aiken Chamber of Commerce Friday morning.
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Stuart MacVean, president and CEO of Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, spoke to members of the Greater Aiken Chamber of Commerce Friday morning and addressed a familiar issue: attracting, and retaining, a young workforce.

"We've learned a lot about what it takes to bring people to the area," MacVean said.

According to the CEO, SRNS has hired approximately 2,000 people in four years – a recruiting campaign that was launched, he said, in the face of a "retirement cliff."

Half of SRNS's employees four years ago were retirement ready, MacVean said, a staffing problem that needed to be addressed.

"That's a lot of people you need to hire in order to replace those folks," MacVean said, adding that the average employee was 54 years old. "That's a real skewing of the population."

Now, the average SRNS employee is 48.

J. David Jameson, president and CEO of the Aiken Chamber of Commerce, described the region's aging workforce as a "silver tsunami."



Stuart MacVean, president and CEO of Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, led the conversation Jan. 5 during the First Friday Means Business breakfast.

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"We know it's here," Jameson said at the First Friday Means Business breakfast. "We've just got to work hard to make sure Aiken is ready."

In 2014, the City of Aiken had more residents above 65 than under 18, according to a benchmark study commissioned by the Chamber. In 2015, the South Carolina population was aging faster than the rest of the nation. The 2016 benchmark study noted there was a continued aging issue. And a 2017 update stated the city's population was "aging faster than any other geographic areas" that were analyzed.

Jameson, in a December interview, said Aiken has not been attracting families with children and has to "grow the lower end of the population" – the younger side.

"It's an important message," Jameson said.

MacVean – who led waste management efforts at the [West Valley Demonstration Project in Buffalo](#), New York, and handled spent nuclear fuel processing at the Sellafield site in the U.K. – said the age issue is not limited to Aiken. He saw it firsthand overseas.

"The U.K. faces the same issue the Savannah River Site has," he said. "It's really kind of a culmination ... An awful lot of people got hired at the same time. There was a big ramp-up in the late '80s, early '90s time period. So that kind of flatlines in the meantime."

At the Savannah River Site – specifically for management and operations contractor SRNS – engaging new and young employees is key: "This new generation wants to come to work and enjoy what they're doing," MacVean said.

A fun atmosphere is important – "They won't just come to work anymore just because it's the right thing to do," the CEO said – as is a sense of community.

"Build a sense of belonging," he said.

Community at SRNS, a primary contractor that had a \$444 million economic impact on Aiken County in 2016, is achieved through experience- and age-segmented mentorship and outreach programs, MacVean said.

"We don't worry about what company you work for ...," MacVean said of the togetherness efforts. "We don't do this just for our folks."

It seems to be paying off. In fiscal year 2017, SRNS hired 546 people. MacVean predicted the contractor would hire another 400 people each successive fiscal year through 2021.

SRNS has seen a 15 percent decrease in non-retiree employee loss, MacVean added.

Those statistics, Jameson said, are "really exciting."



Stuart MacVean, who heads Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, answers questions following his speech at the First Friday Means Business breakfast. MacVean said 50 percent of SRNS employees four years ago were of retirement age.

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