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## **Confectionery makes move to Mills River**

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Mills River -- With its low tax rate, easy access to Interstate 26 and flat land, Mills River has attracted another industry to move from Buncombe County to Henderson County.

American Quality Foods, which manufactures sugar free cake and cookie mixes, plans to move from the Arden area to a new building it will build on 5.67 acres off Banner Farm Road near Van Wingerden International.

The company employs 20 people at its leased location in the Ross Craggon Business Park, but plans to double its operation to employ 40 to 45 within three years, President Kathy Milner said.

The company plans to build a 17,000-square-foot building by Spring of 2007, for investment of about \$2 million in Mills River.

The Town Council recently rezoned about 42 acres off Banner Farm Road from neighborhood commercial to light industrial. That was a condition for Flavor 1st, a Henderson County vegetable growing and packing company, to sell the land to American Quality Foods, said Mark Williams, chief financial officer at Flavor 1st.

"I presented it to both the Planning Board and the Town Council of Mills River. "I gather they seem to be excited about the opportunity it presents to the local community," said Williams, who will take office in December as a Henderson County commissioner. "It definitely is a light industry and compatible with what surrounds it and hopefully will provide some jobs for local people."

Mayor Roger Snyder said the new industry is good for the community.

"I have not met these people but from every indication it is a good company and they want to be a good neighbor," he said.

Flavor 1st asked for the rezoning to light industrial because the neighborhood commercial zoning limited buildings to 10,000 square feet and American Quality Foods needed more space, Williams said. The land will be served by the new sewer line Henderson County built to the nearby Mills River Elementary School.

"Having public sewer and public water made it very desirable for new industry," Williams said. "Hopefully we will continue to see some expansion of the whole area."

American Quality Foods manufactures sugar free desserts mixes and sells them wholesale to hospitals, nursing homes and assisted living facilities, Milner said. About a third of the company's employees live in Henderson County, she said. The operation produces no pollution.

The company uses dried fruit powder including apple powder, but so far has not been able to find a local supplier using Henderson County's abundant apple crop, she said.

"We try to find local suppliers and we definitely prefer to buy local," she said. "I am hoping we can get somebody because there is quite a market."

Milner said a number of factors influenced her company to relocate to Mills River, including the low tax rate and availability of land. Mills River's tax rate is 7.5 cents per \$100, with 1 penny of that going to town operations and the remainder to the fire department. The company now pays Asheville and Buncombe County taxes at its present location.

"We are going to be building a 17,000-square-foot facility so we needed a fairly large piece of land to put that building on," she said. "When you build a building and have that investment we are making in equipment, there is definitely a tax advantage. We are very excited about it I think it is going to be a great place and I think there is a great labor pool in Henderson County."