

# Alexander County's Annual SOTCH Report

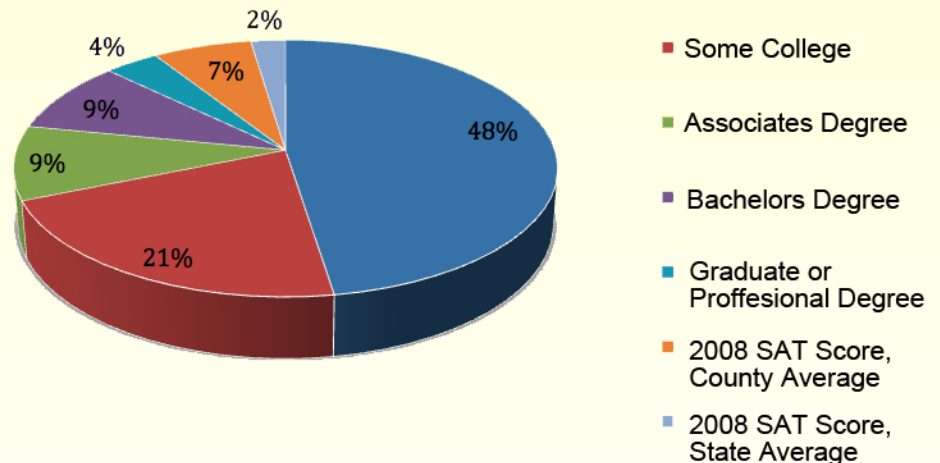
2009

Alexander County is located in the scenic foothills of North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains. Bordered on the south by the Catawba River, the county offers numerous recreational activities, upscale and moderate housing, and opportunities for industrial and commercial operations.

Alexander County's motto is "Gem of North Carolina" referring to the precious emeralds found in the Hiddenite community as well as the low taxes, affordable sites, dependable workforce, and small town quality of life which make Alexander County an attractive location for residents, industries, and businesses.

While focused on diversifying the employment base, Alexander County has maintained its rural nature. Two-thirds of Alexander County's 263 square miles are farmland with an average farm size of approximately 90 acres. Major commodities include poultry, dairy, tobacco, apples, forestry products, grain crops, and beef cattle. While farming has always been an important part of the economy, Alexander County also has a long tradition of manufacturing. In fact, with some 30 percent of the workforce holding manufacturing jobs, the county has one of the highest manufacturing workforce percentages in the state.

Population Aged 25 and Older



Industrial sites are within an easy 20 minute drive of Interstates 40 and 77 and the major urban areas of Hickory, Statesville, and Charlotte. With some 250 acres available, the Alexander Industrial Park features all of the infrastructure required for industrial development. Rail service in the Industrial Park and other sites in the county is provided by the Alexander Railroad Company, a short line railroad working in conjunction with the Norfolk Southern Railroad.

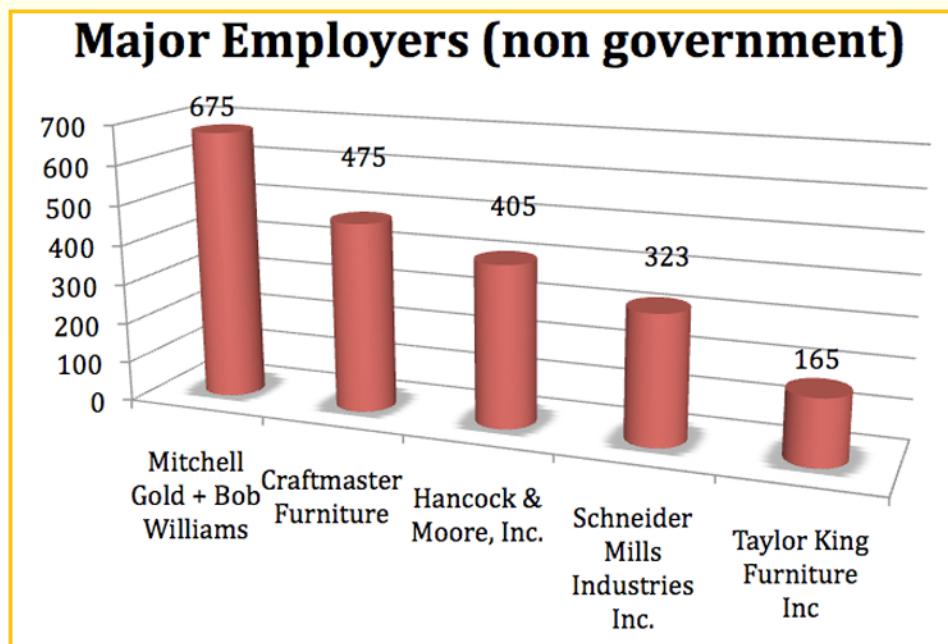
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In 2008, Piedmont Fiberglass, one of the nation's top fiberglass component manufacturers, announced a 170,000 square foot production facility to be located in the county, creating 75 new jobs for the county. The company joins Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, Craftmaster Furniture, Taylor King, Shurtape, Huntington House Furniture, American Roller Bearing, Industrial Timber, Hancock & Moore, and Kincaid Furniture with production facilities also located in Alexander County.

In the past several years, Paragon Films, the sixth largest stretch film manufacturer in North America, announced the construction of a new production facility in Alexander County, along with 30 new jobs. The company is located in the Alexander Industrial Park and, in 2008, purchased an additional 15 acres intended for future expansion.

Schneider Mills, one of the strongest textile mills in the country, was founded in Alexander County more than 60 years ago. The company now has some 323 employees and has recently completed a four-year \$8 million equipment upgrade.



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## Community Issues

Community Assessment of health and human services is an ongoing process that engages multiple agencies, providers, and individuals in identifying community assets and strengths as well as unmet needs. A formal assessment process is undertaken every four years.

### Community Issues as identified by the most recent community assessment:

- Influenza
- Asthma
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases
- Mental Health

Death rates per 100,000	Alexander County	North Carolina
Diseases of the Heart	213.0	210.7
Anus, Rectum, Colon Cancer	20.5	17.8
Trachea, Bronchus, Lung Cancer	76.6	59.6
Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases	48.9	47.5
Unintentional Motor Vehicle Injuries	22.3	19.1
All other Unintentional Injuries	36.1	27.8
Suicide	19.0	11.7

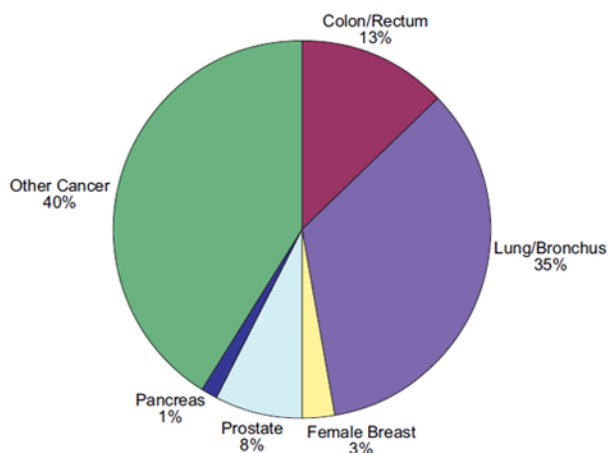
Cancer is the second leading cause of death in North Carolina and in the United States. In 2007, 17,425 persons in North Carolina died from cancer, 78 in Alexander County. It is estimated that nearly four in 10 North Carolinians will develop cancer during their lives.

Cancer is a group of more than 100 different diseases, but all are characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. Cancer risk increases with age, and varies by gender and race. As the average age of the population increases, the incidence of cancer will increase as well. Currently in North Carolina, cancer is the leading cause of death for people under the age of 85. Cancer is expected to surpass heart disease and become the leading cause of death in North Carolina and the nation by the year 2015. The majority of cancer deaths occur at five sites: lung, colon, female breast, prostate, and pancreas (Figure 1).

**Table 1. 2007 Percent of Cancer Deaths in Alexander County Compared to 2007 Percent of Cancer Deaths in North Carolina**

<b>Alexander County</b>	<b>North Carolina</b>
<b>24.4%</b>	<b>23.0%</b>

**Figure 1. Alexander County 2007 Cancer Deaths by Site**



It is generally accepted that over 60 percent of all cancers are related to personal lifestyle or environmental factors, such as smoking and diet, and are therefore preventable. Other factors such as age, gender, and family history of a specific cancer are also associated with the development of cancer and aid in the identification of people at high risk. For several cancers, effective treatment is available. For these cancers, early detection saves lives. For example, almost 98 percent of women who are diagnosed with breast cancer in the earliest stage survive the disease, whereas only 26 percent survive if the disease is diagnosed in the most advanced stage. The opportunity for disease control and for reducing the number of cancer deaths rests with prevention and early detection so that treatment of the disease can be effective.

In 2006, 172 cancer cases were reported for Alexander County residents. These numbers are expected to increase as the population ages.

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## Community Accomplishments

### Influenza

As we combat the H1N1 virus, we have been utilizing our pandemic plans since August, 2009. Many schools in Alexander County reached a 25% absenteeism rate due to flu like symptoms. We will continue to vaccinate our community to minimize the detrimental effects of the new strain. Alexander County had one death in November, 2009 due to H1N1 compared to 13 deaths statewide.

Accomplishments to date include:

1. Collaborating with community partners on our local pandemic flu plan.
2. Outreach education efforts to prepare our citizens with personal home plans.
3. Provided multiple community presentations on pandemic flu preparedness.
4. Flu vaccination clinics have been provided throughout the county.

### Cardiovascular Disease

Sedentary lifestyles, high fat diets, and increased Body Mass Index are leading contributors. Accomplishments to date include:

1. Held County Wellness Fair for all Alexander County employees along with a wide variety of wellness programs offered.
2. All County Employees received free memberships to the Alexander County YMCA.
3. Eat Smart Move More Weigh Less classes offered in Alexander County in partnership between the Alexander County Health Department and the Alexander County Cooperative Extension.

### Mental Health

Our mental health services continue to decline as our communities needs for these services increases. With mental health reform our system as all systems in North Carolina has seen drastic budget cuts. Alexander County's community provider and local mental health management entity has changed. Smokey Mountain Center contracts with New River Behavioral Health Center to provide mental health services for Alexander County. Current wait times have improved from eight weeks to four weeks to see a Psychiatrist for a new patient. We continue to work toward increasing services and capacity for mental health services in Alexander County.

### Asthma

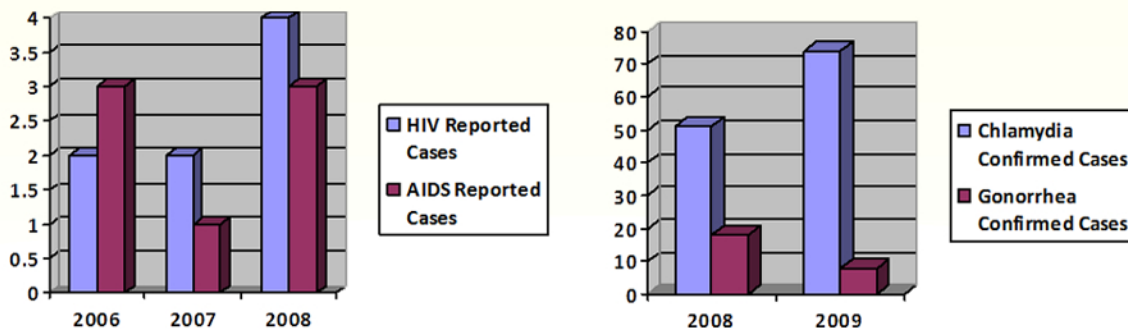
Asthma is the most common chronic condition in school age children in our community. According to the annual school health report more school days are lost from asthma related illnesses than any other condition. Accomplishments to date include:

1. Asthma coalition has distributed 1000 clipboards and First Aid Kits given out to all recreational coaches.
2. Distributed asthma flags to all county buildings and schools in Alexander County.
3. Developed and provided Asthma education program to all coaches in Alexander County Recreation Department.
4. Held First Annual Asthma Forum on April 23, 2009. Event was open to the public with Dr. Inglefield as the guest speaker.
5. Members of the Asthma Coalition attended the statewide Asthma Summit in Raleigh, NC.

### Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually Transmitted Diseases remain a major public health challenge in Alexander County. Alexander County Health Department is continuing outreach efforts to educate the public on sexually transmitted diseases in hopes to cause a decline in new cases of sexually transmitted diseases in our county. We are continuing to raise awareness and educate citizens on prevention strategies and will work with community partners to identify at risk populations for increased education, prevention efforts and enhanced screenings.

Alexander County Aids, HIV Cases, Chlamydia, and Gonorrhea by Year Reported



The above graphs show a slight increase in HIV, and Chlamydia Cases and a decline in Gonorrhea cases in Alexander County

### New Initiatives

Alexander County is in its third year on the Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant (SPF-SIG). A DWI taskforce was formed in hopes to reduce alcohol related crashes in Alexander County. The committee has developed a strategic plan along with various health education programs and media advocacy events to draw attention to educational activities concerning personal consequences of drinking and driving, DWI laws, and responsible adult drinking behavior.

## Cited Sources:

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3. North Carolina Electronic Disease Surveillance System, Database Report, 2008-2009.
4. State Center for Health Statistics, County Data book 2003-2007
5. Workforce Development Report, June 2009. Employment Security Commission of North Carolina