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VP: Target not just about the bottom line

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Tiffany Leon at Button Gwinnett Elementary is ready to begin her Bright Ideas project. She won a grant to buy supplies for her students to study insects

1 of 1 [View Larger](#)

By **Andrea Washington**

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A who's who of local business, political and community leaders converged at the Target distribution center in Midway for the site's grand opening Wednesday afternoon.

Following a special tour of the 1.5 million sq. ft. facility, which will serve as a way station for merchandise shipped to Target retail stores throughout Georgia South, Carolina and Miami, guests joined about 250 of the warehouse's employees for the much-anticipated ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"It's my distinct pleasure to welcome you all here. This is a culmination of a couple of years of effort," distribution center general manager Marco Furforo said. "Target's presence in the state continues to grow and Georgia continues

to be a great part of our Target strategy."

The second-largest discount retailer in the country, Furforo noted a major portion of the company's strategy was taking care of its 350,000 employees, including the 600 recent hires at its newest distribution center.

"This is a big building," he said. "There's a lot of concrete, there's a lot of machines, a lot of conveyors, but you guys are the heart and soul of this building."

Although questions have floated around the community about where the "heart and soul" has come from, Target Senior Resource Manager Amanda Martin said a majority of the employees chosen from the applicant pool are from Liberty County.

And according to Hinesville Mayor Tom Ratcliffe, that is good news for the community.

"I think the thing that is very exciting is that over half of the persons being employed here are from Liberty County," he said. "I think that is indicative of the goal of the economic development authority to create jobs that can be taken by our local community."

With salaries starting at about \$13 an hour, Target Senior Vice President of Distribution Mitch Stover said the company currently pays better than other distribution centers in the market and plans to become "the premiere employer" in the area.

The wages earned by workers will reportedly have a direct impact of \$20 million a year, with the possibility of equaling up to \$50 million a year, which one county commissioner said will assist in continuing Liberty County's economic growth.

"With them being staffed with 600 employees, I think most of those employees will spend their money in Liberty County," commissioner Connie Thrift said. "I believe this is a great asset to the community as a whole."

But Stover said Target was not just about enhancing its own or the community's bottom line.

"For 50 years, we've donated 5 percent of our pre-tax profits back to the communities that we serve across the nation," he said. "And today, that is over \$3 million per week."

The company got off to a good start of giving back to its new community by awarding more than \$20,000 in grants to the Kiwanis Club, Liberty County Council on Child Abuse, Mary Lou Fraser Foundation for Families, Liberty County Family Connections, Seabrook Village Foundation, Red Cross, United Way of the Coastal Empire and Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield Department of Morale, Welfare and Recreation.

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