It’s time to bury the myth that Yazoo County doesn’t have a strong workforce with the witch in Glenwood Cemetery.

The current myth has probably done more damage to Yazoo than the old mythical witch who supposedly burned down the town in 1904.

Yazooans came together and quickly rebuilt from the Great Fire. For too long many of us have bought into the idea that our county is unworthy of attention from potential new businesses and watched as opportunities passed us by.

One of the first things you’ll hear when you start talking about economic development is, “Oh we’ll never get that. We just don’t have enough people who want to work,” or “We just don’t have a qualified workforce to attract that kind of business.”

I’ve heard plenty of that kind of talk from many of our own citizens, but the man responsible for bringing one of Yazoo’s new largest employers to town has a very different story to tell.

Rob Wells, CEO of the company that just opened a new call center that has brought 80 good jobs to downtown Yazoo City, said he was pleasantly surprised by Yazoo’s workforce. With similar operations in six states, Wells has plenty of experience seeking out employees in new communities. He said Yazoo has made the best yet.

Some of the things Wells pointed out included:

n Yazoo applicants were the best educated. Of all the call centers in six states, Yazoo had the highest level of applicants with post-high school education.

n Yazoo applicants understood the value of making a good first impression. Wells said in other areas many applicants have shown up for interviews wearing shorts, tank tops or tennis shoes. In Yazoo he said they “dressed like they were going to church.”

n Yazooans know how to close the deal. Making a good first impression is no small matter, but it’s what happens when they really get to know you that really matters. Yazoo passed that test with flying colors. On average, 12 to 15 percent drop out during the training process for these call centers. Not one single Yazooan threw in the towel.

n Yazooans have proven worthy of the company’s confidence. Eleven percent of the new employees have already received promotions due to their outstanding performance.

That’s a great testament to the quality of Yazoo County’s workforce, and it’s a message that you can bet our leaders will be sharing when looking to attract other new business to our community.

There are still many Yazooans looking for new jobs or better jobs. There are many Yazooans commuting to Jackson or other metro-area cities to work because they must follow the opportunities. We’ve also got numerous Yazoo natives graduating from college each year.

Many of them would love to return to their hometown if the opportunities are there. I am an example of someone who jumped at the opportunity to come home and continue my career. Don’t believe the myth that we can’t hold our own when competing for other communities for new business. When we do that, we are our own worst enemy.

Is there room for improvement in Yazoo’s workforce? Yes. Do we need to push hard to continue improving our education system and seeking new ways to best prepare Yazooans to compete for the best jobs? Absolutely.

But in the meantime, it’s past time that we stop listening to those who think Yazoo is unfit to compete for new opportunities because it’s simply not true.

.....

Jason Patterson is the managing editor of The Yazoo Herald. He can be reached at 746-4911 or by e-mail at managing1@bellsouth.net.