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Mississippi’s Gov. Phil Bryant is passionate about his state’s success and its future.

Glenn McCullough Jr. Interview
Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority Glenn McCullough leads the state to some of its biggest economic development wins ever.

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BUSINESS CLIMATE OVERVIEW

HOW MISSISSIPPI PUNCHES ABOVE ITS WEIGHT CLASS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

If the state of Mississippi were a prize fighter, it would be a lot like Sugar Ray Leonard: small in stature, but packing a powerful punch. Though only 3 million strong in population, the Magnolia State delivers a roundhouse well above its weight class when it comes to the high-stakes world of economic development.

Look no further than its successful bid to land Continental Tire last year. Beating out multiple states, Mississippi won this $1.45-billion gem that’s bringing 2,500 good-paying jobs to Clinton. And that’s not all. Mississippi’s business climate is getting a lot of love from a lot of reputable sources these days. Mississippi ranks No. 2 among all 50 states in lowest overall cost of doing business, according to CNBC, and No. 3 in most competitive labor costs.

Mississippi also boasts the No. 3 state for export growth, according to the U.S. Chamber Foundation, and...
the No. 1 overall lowest cost of living, per CNBC.
Among other notable rankings, Mississippi scores:
- No. 1 in production of biomass products (USDA).
- No. 3 in shipbuilding (USDOT).
- No. 4 in incentive programs (Area Development).
- No. 6 among the Most Tax-Friendly States for Business (Kiplinger).
- No. 8 for the performance of its state highway system (21st Annual Highway Report).
- No. 9 for competitive utility rates (Area Development).
- No. 10 for access to capital and project funding (Area Development).

Mississippi Development Authority Executive Director Glenn McCullough, Jr. says that achievements like these do not happen by accident. They occur because the state — from the Governor’s Office on down — is 100 percent committed to supporting business investment.

A right-to-work state, Mississippi has one of the lowest union membership rates in the nation, while maintaining a high percentage of manufacturing jobs at 12.1 percent. Gov. Phil Bryant strengthened this position in 2014 by signing into law a series of bills aimed at providing further protection for the state’s right-to-work status.

Mississippi’s community college system is widely considered to be one of the strongest in the nation in worker training; and the Tort Reform Act of 2004 established Mississippi as one of the most business-friendly states in the country.

All these factors are a big reason why Continental Tire the Americas LLC committed last February to building its largest tire plant in North America in Hinds County, Mississippi.

“The project in Hinds County is part of our global growth strategy,” said Nikolai Setzer, Continental’s executive board member for the tire business. “We thank the state of Mississippi, Hinds County and the city of Clinton and Gov. Bryant for his leadership in bringing us to the Jackson area, and we look forward to a strong business relationship for years to come.”

In the boxing world, that would be called a victory by knockout.

No. 1 overall lowest cost of living.

No. 3 state for export growth.

Mississippi boasts the state for export growth.

SOURCE: U.S. CHAMBER FOUNDATION

SOURCE: CNBC
PASSION PAYS OFF

GOV. BRYANT RELENTLESSLY FocusES ON IMPROVING MISSISSIPPI’S BUSINESS CLIMATE.

by RON STARNER

Spend any amount of time talking with Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant, and you will quickly learn what he is most passionate about: family, faith, jobs, business climate, education and freedom.

America has only 50 state governors, but it’s safe to say that no state has a more energetic and committed leader than Bryant.

A few core principles guide his every action, and that lends both stability and predictability to the pro-business environment that Bryant and the legislature have painstakingly nurtured in the Magnolia State.

From raising the funding for education to increasing worker training, Bryant has made it clear that he will not rest until every Mississippi resident and family have good jobs, safe neighborhoods, good schools and an opportunity to pursue happiness and a better life.

He also works tirelessly to make sure that companies understand that.

“If we get a company to come and see our infrastructure, workforce, tax environment and low union rate, they will want to move here,” the governor said recently.

That’s exactly what happened last year when Continental Tire the Americas LLC selected Mississippi over several competing states for a record $1.45-billion capital investment into a 2,500-job, 1 million-square-foot manufacturing complex between Jackson and Clinton.
“This will be the most technologically advanced plant ever built by Continental,” Bryant says, adding that he’s equally committed to building the advanced workforce that employers like Continental will need to remain globally competitive for years to come.

That’s why the son of a diesel mechanic signed the State Workforce Bill into law on March 21, 2016. The legislation established the $50 million Mississippi Works Fund, which is used to train Mississippi’s workforce and support the state’s industries and businesses. Under the bill:

- 75 percent of the funds are allocated toward new job creation.
- 25 percent of the funds are allocated for existing workforce and worker certification.
- Training is provided primarily through Mississippi’s community college system.
- The Mississippi Development Authority has the ability to direct funds as part of recruitment and expansion efforts.

Bryant knows the importance of worker training because he is a product of community college education himself. Born in Moorhead 64 years ago, he earned an associate’s degree in criminal justice from Hinds Community College and began his career as a deputy sheriff in Hinds County before working as an insurance investigator. He also holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Southern Mississippi and a master’s in political science from Mississippi College.

“Workforce is critical,” he says. “I started working six years ago to have a vertically integrated workforce training system in place in Mississippi, starting in middle school and high school. We started dual enrollment with high school and community college, and we invest in our community colleges.”

Freedom is equally important to the two-term governor — including freedom from over-taxation and burdensome regulations. “I have been able to cut taxes on corporations more than 40 times,” he says.

Among the governor’s boldest moves were his successful efforts to phase out the franchise tax and inventory tax on businesses in Mississippi. “Those are two major opportunities we have had to make Mississippi much better,” he notes. “We have one of the best tax environments in the U.S.”

The media is starting to take note. For the first time ever, Area Development magazine awarded Mississippi a gold shovel for excellence in economic development; and executives who receive Site Selection magazine said recently in a survey that Mississippi has the 12th best business climate in America.

“My primary goal as governor is to make sure every Mississippian who wants a job has a job,” Bryant says, and he is delivering on his word. Since he first took office in 2012, Mississippi has added more than 60,000 jobs and the state’s unemployment rate has reached historic lows.

“With the help of legislative leadership, we have created a tax and regulatory climate that routinely places Mississippi at or near the top of every measurement as it relates to ease and cost of doing business,” he adds. “Innovation thrives in our economy because we believe in empowering the private sector, not unnecessarily restricting it. We have guaranteed equal opportunity, not equal outcomes.”

For more than half a decade, Bryant has been following through on those promises. Some $1.8 billion in state-assisted capital later, it’s safe to say that his unrelenting passion is paying off big for more Mississippians than ever before.
since being appointed by Gov. Phil Bryant in May 2015 to serve as executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority, Glenn McCullough, Jr., has led the state to some of its biggest economic development wins in history.

Chief among them was the $1.4 billion, 2,500-job Continental Tire deal in Clinton. After that record-shattering project was announced last February, McCullough said, “We play to win, and Mississippi wins with people.”

In the following interview, McCullough — a former chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority and former Tupelo mayor — shares his thoughts on the past and future of economic growth in Mississippi.

What have been MDA’s three biggest economic development wins of the past year?

MCCULLOUGH: Gov. Bryant, our Legislature and MDA are very proud to have one of Site Selection’s Top Deals of the Year in Continental Tire.

MDA also worked with our partners across the state on Niagara Bottling in Marshall County in Northeast Mississippi — a plastic bottling company investment of $78 million. Pine Belt and the University of Southern Mississippi worked together on landing a huge Regions Bank project. They selected Hattiesburg and confirmed a $27.2-million capital investment there. We also landed a Japanese tier one supplier, Calsonic Kansei, in Madison — a $16.3-million capital investment that is creating 98 new jobs.

What are your top priorities for the coming year?

MCCULLOUGH: Gov. Bryant loves to remind people that Mississippi wins with people. We win with people who provide an advantage in workforce. MDA and our partners will focus on advancing the advantages that the Mississippi workforce offers business and industry. Last week, we opened the Mississippi Coding Academy in Jackson. Some 17 young students there are the coders of the future. They are participating in an intensive 11-month training program to become coders. This is a partnership of Innovate Mississippi, the Community College Board, the state Workforce Investment Board and MDA. We also now have funding available for the Mississippi Ready Site Program. We will have shovel-ready sites that will give us an advantage in economic development.

Did Mississippi implement any substantive policy changes this year that affected its business climate, incentives or overall economic development approach?

MCCULLOUGH: Gov. Bryant and the Legislature adopted a reduction in the franchise tax — a tax on capital invested. Phase-out begins in 2018 and over 10 years it will work toward a zero rate. We think that is a pro-business tax reduction that will enable business leaders in Mississippi to invest more capital in our state.

What is the biggest misconception about Mississippi?

MCCULLOUGH: Gov. Bryant and I are both lifelong Mississippians. There are opportunities to better tell our story in North America and around the world. We are proud to make things. About 13 percent...
of our workforce is employed in manufacturing. We make neat things and we can export them through two deep-water ports. Huntington Ingalls makes 70 percent of the Navy’s warships at Pascagoula. Rolls-Royce, Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman are all here in aerospace. They make the F-35 and the Global Hawk unmanned aerial system. Calgon expanded here. McDermott is a global energy leader at the Port of Gulfport. Most bananas consumed in the U.S. go through that port. We have the Air Force’s primary cybersecurity training base here.

We are proud to be a diverse state. We have automotive. Nissan is making additional capital investment in Canton. They assemble eight Nissan models that are shipped around the world — for a total of 350,000 vehicles a year. Toyota assembles 200,000 Corollas each year at Blue Springs. A Corolla rolls off the assembly line there every 94 seconds. Advanced manufacturing is huge in our state.

Still, we want to do a better job of telling our story. For example, there are two Grammy Museums in the world, and one is in Cleveland, Mississippi, not far from the B.B. King Museum. Elvis Presley was born in Tupelo. The Jimmie Rodgers Museum is here. Tammy Wynette was born in Tupelo. Some 23 million visitors came to Mississippi this year. That is 700,000 more visitors than the year before. Jackson will host the International Ballet. William Faulkner is from Oxford.

What is the global brand identity of Mississippi? What would you like it to be?

MCCULLOUGH: We believe that our brand in North America and around the world is that Mississippi Works. Whether you are talking about manufacturing, aerospace, shipbuilding, chemicals, banking, health care, telemedicine, etc., Mississippi works for business and industry. Internationally, we are known for the big river and we are proud of that. We are proud that we have navigable waters on three borders: the Mississippi River, the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway and the Gulf of Mexico. We have two deep-water ports: Pascagoula and Gulfport. And we have the huge advantage of our timber industry. Some 19.7 million acres of Mississippi is covered in forest. It covers two-thirds of the state. This provides a big advantage for us in construction, wood products and other industries. For example, Drax Biomass based in the UK has a successful operation here.

What about the future excites you?

MCCULLOUGH: A point of pride is our Mission to Mars. It starts in Mississippi. The rocket engines that will take an American to Mars will be tested at the Stennis Space Center. Rolls-Royce just celebrated its 10th anniversary here. Every manned space flight went first through Stennis Space Center, going back to the Apollo program.

We also help feed and clothe the world. Agribusiness is a huge part of the Mississippi economy. Uncle Ben’s is owned by Mars Corp. and is moving its R&D from California to Greenville, Mississippi. We are very proud to be a farm state. We are the Catfish Capital of the World and the Sweet Potato Capital of the World. We grow a lot of sweet potatoes in Mississippi; and 2.5 billion pounds of pecans are grown here.

We are very proud to have the first planned community college system in the U.S. We are just shy of 3 million in population, and every Mississippi resident lives within 30 minutes of a community college. Those schools are nationally ranked in every category. They make sure that Mississippi does work. Finally, Mississippi is the first state to be invited to join the Royal Commonwealth Society. The UK is looking to establish relationships in North America. Mississippi is the first state to be invited to join the RCS. There will be a lot of economic and social and cultural advantages due to this.
Millennials, born between 1982 and 2000, make up the largest generation of Americans and most states are seeing an increase in the demographic’s population. However, according to a Governing.com analysis of census data, Mississippi has seen a nearly 4 percent drop in millennial population since 2010.

But, says Joe Lichtenhan, co-founder of Hattiesburg-based Hybrid Plastics, “It’s not a bad thing. Let them leave and get some experience and they’ll come back.”

Hybrid Plastics is a chemical and nanotechnology company that often hires graduates of Mississippi’s world-class universities.

“When I travel, I find a lot of people from Southern Miss at these different polymer companies I go to and all of them say ‘Yeah, you know I’m up here in Boston, or wherever, but gosh I miss Mississippi. Let me know if you guys are hiring.’

Mississippi has a charm that I think gets into your DNA. And they learn to appreciate that after they’ve gone out and experienced the big city lights.”

Indeed, according to the 2017 Mayflower Mover Insight Study, 53 percent of millennials say they are likely to move to a new city temporarily, 74 percent said they had a timeline in mind, meaning they only intend to stay in that place for a certain number of years. The study also found that millennials raised in urban areas tend to move further way from their home cities, compared to those who grew up in more rural areas.

Millennials who choose to stay or move back home to Mississippi find a culturally diverse state with open arms, opportunities and an affordable quality of life. Mississippi ranks No. 10 in affordable housing for millennials, according to a GOBankingRates ranking that uses housing cost data from Zillow, and the amount of time it would take to save for a 20 percent down payment based on the national median income for millennials ($60,932). The median list price in Mississippi is $179,000, the average monthly mortgage payment is about $790.

MILLENIAL MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Armed with data and driven by a passion for the Magnolia State, residents like Rep. Jeramey Anderson are taking steps to make Mississippi a more attractive landscape for millennials today and the generations to follow.

In 2013, Anderson was elected to represent District 110 (Moss Point and Pascagoula) in the Mississippi Legislature. The now 25-year-old lawmaker also serves as the co-chairman of the Mississippi Future Caucus, part of the Millennial Action Project’s bipartisan national movement. The Mississippi Future Caucus is a bipartisan group of legislators under the age of 40 focused on addressing issues that affect the Millennial generation across the state.

Anderson says many of the state’s millennials are choosing to live in the coastal region to take advantage of its nightlife, scenery and quality of life.

“It sounds weird, but I love the big city environment. I just hate the traffic and being around a lot of people,” Anderson says with a laugh. “On the coast we have those same amenities — we have the bars, the casinos and the clubs — but at the same time I can get from my house to the casino in 10 minutes, and that’s in heavy traffic. We’re just not congested here with traffic and all those other big city issues. That’s what makes Mississippi such a great place, the coast specifically. I see it growing much, much more over the next few years.” Anderson notes cities like Jackson and Hattiesburg are also focused on retaining their millennial population and says he expects to see those areas grow up quite a bit over the next few years as well.

One of the ways Anderson and other lawmakers aims to ease the state’s millennial angst is to help continue to improve the state’s business climate, create jobs, and encourage people to enjoy the state’s unique Southern hospitality.
“We like to attract business, that’s the first thing,” Anderson said. “We want all businesses, small, medium and large, to come in, bring their employees and find a quality of life that will let them stay here for five, 10, 20 years. The climate here is extremely vibrant. People in the state as a whole are interested in new opportunities and the state is making strides to really change the way we embrace the business culture and making sure that companies that are moving in have a fair shot at being the driving forces in our economy.”

Since graduating from University of Southern Mississippi in 2007, Katie Ward has kept an eye on the Hattiesburg bridal market. Ward began her company, Bliss Bridal, a bridal boutique (pictured), when she was just 25 years old in Fairhope, Alabama. Five years later, the millennial entrepreneur expanded and opened another location in New Orleans, Louisiana. Now, at age 32, she’s recently opened her largest boutique to date in Hattiesburg.

“I always loved the community there, I always felt like it was a hometown for me. I’ve always kind of kept my eye on the market there and I knew there wasn’t a bridal shop with my business framework within the city,” Ward says.

In the first two weeks of business, Ward says her shop has surpassed expectations. The 2,600-square-foot boutique is located inside of a historic former pharmacy in Downtown Hattiesburg.

“We’re very excited to be in downtown Hattiesburg,” Ward says. “The space we’re in had been empty for 20 years and no one could ever figure out what to do with it. We just saw it and knew that it was going to evolve into exactly what it has become. I know Hattiesburg will be very, very successful for us. We really see Hattiesburg becoming one of our strongest locations and we’ve already opened to strong business.”

Ward says smaller communities, like Hattiesburg and others in the state, have a way of facilitating a company’s success.

“When you join a small community versus a large metropolitan area, the community really cares to see the success of people who are investing in their communities,” Ward says.

“Mississippi has a charm that I think gets into your DNA. And they learn to appreciate that after they’ve gone out and experienced the big city lights.”

—Joe Lichtenhan, co-founder of Hattiesburg-based Hybrid Plastics

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The Mississippi Polymer Institute was established at the USM in 1993 with the initial goal of assisting polymer and material businesses as they grow within the state. By 1995, the institute had become an early adopter of 3D printing technology which helped the institute to evolve into the world-class facility it is today.

MPI is now housed within the USM Innovation and Commercialization Park, inside the 60,000-square-foot tech-based incubator faculty called The Accelerator. The $28-million facility is located 5 miles away from the USM campus and offers resources for high-tech industries including composites, polymers, biotechnology, alternative energy and others. MPI offers more than 6,000 square feet of office space, wet labs, mechanical testing, data sources. Offered through the College of Business. Master of Science in Economic Development (MSED) graduate students prepare the data under faculty supervision. Typical studies include economic impact studies, feasibility studies, community asset and workforce analysis. Earn a MSED degree at Southern Miss in a one-year executive-format program while learning to foster economic growth through real projects for real clients.

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compounding, extrusion and training labs as well as 3D printing.

With its focus on fostering business growth, MPI allows access to resources that smaller companies and startups wouldn’t necessarily have the capital to purchase on their own. Some of MPI’s capabilities include polymer synthesis, composite manufacturing, testing, compounding, extruding, molding, design CAD modeling, 3D printing, workforce training and educational outreach.

Robert Thompson, MPI assistant director, says workforce development is also a large part of the institute’s efforts. MPI’s workforce development courses include lean manufacturing, introductory courses to polymers and 3D printing, injection molding and other specialized training. Businesses can take advantage of these courses on- or off-site. MPI has almost 600 clients in Mississippi and works with another 260 global companies.

One such company is GE Aviation, which opened its 344,000-square-foot composite manufacturing facility in 2013 in Ellisville. The $56-million plant called upon MPI and Jones County Junior College to develop and deliver composite training for its workforce. The plant has since become Praxair Surface Technologies, a joint venture between Praxair, Inc. and GE Aviation called PG Technologies that provides the specialized coatings for various components used in nearly all of GE’s aircraft engines.

“We’ve worked closely with GE Aviation and Jones County Junior College to build five high-performance composite material classes for the workforce at GE Aviation,” says Thompson. “Basically, what these classes were designed to do was to give people an understanding of what is a composite material, and how you make them. It also gives them some lab time where they go in and work with some composite materials. And then GE takes them and progresses their skills.”

High school students are also able to take advantage of MPI’s industrial expertise. The institute has partnered with 10 high schools around the state to offer students a two-year vocational STEM program. Students earn credits in chemistry while being exposed to new career opportunities.

Thompson says it’s important for site selectors to understand the richness of opportunity for polymer businesses in Mississippi, whether they’re just starting out or looking to expand.

“The main thing for folks to know who are looking to locate here is encouragement that we have a workforce that’s willing to work, has good work ethic,” says Thompson. “And not just through the polymer institute, but also through the other universities and community colleges around the state, we have those capabilities to make sure that their workers have the skills they need.”
Training the Leaders of the Factories of the Future

by RON STARNER

The leaders of Mississippi’s manufacturing workforce of tomorrow are being developed today at the Haley Barbour Center for Manufacturing Excellence. Located on the campus of the University of Mississippi in Oxford, the CME is unique in America and often billed as the Magnolia State’s trump card in economic development.

Ryan T. Miller, associate director for external operations at the CME, has spent the last 20 years of his life at Ole Miss, but he says the biggest thrill he gets is watching companies grow in Mississippi because of the leaders trained at the center named after one of the state’s most impactful governors. In the following interview, Miller shares the philosophy and successes of the CME.

How does the Center for Manufacturing Excellence support economic development in Mississippi?

MILLER: The CME is a direct result of the foresight of Haley Barbour. While he was governor and working with our former chancellor, there was a desire to continue his path to success in workforce development which we achieved when we landed the breakthrough Toyota plant. At Ole Miss, the goal of the CME is to assist companies in a very comprehensive way. I like to tell people that the CME is basically a modern languages program. We partner with the School of Business Administration, the School of Accountancy and the School of Engineering to teach our students the languages they will need to be leaders in manufacturing. It provides skill sets and versatility to help people adapt to a changing landscape in manufacturing. Toyota helped us launch the CME because they have a deep passion to see manufacturing education grow in Mississippi. They made it clear that the CME needs to benefit all manufacturing. When they moved here, they made resources available to create this program and other programs in our community college systems and other four-year institutions.

Do you have any recent success stories you can share?

MILLER: Looking through the lens of economic development, our mission is to assist companies. We help existing industries grow and become healthier. Our students participate in three courses that we have created from scratch from within TPM — the Toyota Production Model. They learn in a real factory environment. Milwaukee Tool in Greenwood has 12 to 15 students at a time working in their factory there. The company announced it is adding 660 jobs at three Mississippi locations. 500 of those at the Greenwood location. The Parker-Hannifin Racor Division in Holly Springs partners with us too and takes 12 to 15 students at a time to work on real problems in their plant. Students are getting class credit for tangible, hands-on experience. The results of those projects have led to increased production, cost reduction, helping workers have a better experience. 

What are your plans for 2018?

MILLER: We have a brand-new director, Dr. Matthew O’Keefe, starting in January. He comes to us from the Missouri University of Science and Technology in Raleigh, Missouri. We want to see the CME grow in faculty and staff. We are developing a graduate program that would benefit our current students and industry. We have 200 students in the CME.

What is your biggest advantage?

MILLER: We are taking raw material in the form of 18-year-old students and turning them into very versatile workers in manufacturing. The experience they get in their coursework at CME makes them very adaptable. It costs money to train people, and we are able to help employers save some of that money. The benefit CME provides serves as an attraction to other companies. Mississippi is an exciting destination for manufacturers. We are essentially a minor on steroids. The complexity of what we do is unique. You won’t find anything like CME anywhere else in the country.

“Students are getting class credit for tangible, hands-on experience. The results of those projects have led to increased production, cost reduction, helping workers have a better experience.” — Ryan Miller, Associate Director for External Operations, CME
Leading with a Laser Focus

Economic Development Is Job One at Mississippi’s Institutes of Higher Learning.

by Ron Starner

If anyone has ever been prepared to lead higher education at the state level, then it’s safe to say that their resume would not outpace that of Dr. Glenn Boyce. The Commissioner of Higher Education for Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, he has more than 30 years of experience at all levels of education. He has served as president, vice president for community and workforce development, and district director of career-technical education for Holmes Community College; assistant superintendent for secondary programs for the Rankin County School District; and high school and attendance center principal of the Northwest Rankin Attendance Center.

He has been a part of many important boards, including the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Commission on College Accreditation and the State Longitudinal Data System Governing Board. He has also collaborated with the Central Mississippi Planning and Development District, Three Rivers Planning and Development District, North Central Development District, and Mississippi Automotive Manufacturers Association.

Dr. Boyce holds a bachelor’s degree in education from the University of Mississippi, a master’s degree in education administration from Mississippi College, and a doctorate in education leadership from the University of Mississippi.

In short, Dr. Boyce is exactly the leader that Economic Development Is Job One at Mississippi’s Institutes of Higher Learning.

by Ron Starner

Davis Wade Stadium on the campus of Mississippi State University

Photo by Shay La’Vee
central casting would provide. In the following interview, he talks about the many ways in which colleges and universities in Mississippi support economic development.

How does higher education in Mississippi support the overall economic development mission of the state?

BOYCE: Mississippi Public Universities support the economic development mission of the state by preparing Mississippi students with the knowledge and skills needed to attract business and industry to the state and having the research capabilities needed once they are here. Offering 891 degree programs, Mississippi Public Universities served 95,817 students in academic year 2017. A total of 17,760 degrees were awarded in 2017. There has been an 8.9 percent increase in all degrees conferred and a 17.9 percent increase in STEM degrees conferred in the last five years. Mississippi Public Universities also help Mississippi businesses grow through innovation, research, service and education. Universities received $420.7 million in external research funding, supporting 2,407 projects last year.

How does higher education in Mississippi support innovation and entrepreneurship?

BOYCE: Mississippi Public Universities have 352 Centers and Institutes, including some that focus on innovation and entrepreneurship. There are several programs offered by the universities that support innovation and entrepreneurship. The University of Mississippi’s Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship works to inspire and assist students in creating new businesses by providing the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to becoming successful entrepreneurs. The center’s activities include coordinating scholarships and internships for students, providing guest speakers to inspire and mentor students, and sponsoring the annual Gillespie Business Plan Competition, which earns startup funds for winning entrepreneurs.

Delta State University hosts an annual Summer Youth Entrepreneurship Program. The program, in partnership with the Indianola Promise Community, is sponsored by Delta State University’s College of Business and Aviation. Targeting male students ages 15 to 19, the camp provides instruction in business vocabulary and practical work experience to enhance entrepreneurial skills and develop work ethics. The IPC is funded by the Delta Health Alliance. At Mississippi State University, the Center for Entrepreneurship and Outreach in the College of Business provides a world-class launch pad for startup ventures. The 12,000-square-foot facility provides expansive collaboration space, offices, meeting areas and workstations. Built through $6 million in endowments and private donations, the E-Center and business incubator has helped students from 40 different majors start their own businesses.

What role do your institutions perform in fulfilling the workforce development missions of the state?

BOYCE: Mississippi Public Universities produce graduates that fill the workforce needs of the state. In 2017, there were:

- 3,727 STEM graduates.
- 2,849 health care graduates (including nursing).
- 71 percent of nursing graduates working in Mississippi five years after graduation.
- 2,088 education graduates (all levels).
- 72 percent of education graduates working in Mississippi five years after graduation.

What is the annual economic impact of Mississippi’s universities on the state each year?

BOYCE: Expenditures of Mississippi Public Universities generate $3.46 billion in economic impacts in the state. For every $1 the state invests in Mississippi’s public universities, there is a $3.21 return to Mississippi’s economy. In 2015, Mississippi Public Universities’ contribution to Mississippi’s employment was 59,258 direct and indirect jobs.
It’s not everywhere you can find space to fly next door to young talent ready to soar. Among the R&D investments tracked in Mississippi by Site Selection’s Conway Projects Database over the past five years are a $20-million maritime-oriented project in Pascagoula from Northrop Grumman (which also does aerospace work in the state in Moss Point). The state’s reputation for waterborne and airborne research and development is founded on manufacturing strengths around such infrastructure assets as its ports, Stennis Space Center. The other infrastructure asset feeding into R&D is the state’s network of higher learning institutions, led by the University of Mississippi in Oxford and Mississippi State University in Starkville. One of the most recent R&D investments — a 23-job facility from Washington-based Boeing’s unmanned aerial vehicle subsidiary Insitu — just held its grand opening in Starkville in October 2017. A big reason the project went to Starkville? The Federal Aviation Administration in May 2015 chose to locate the Center of Excellence for Unmanned Aircraft Systems there. The Alliance for System Safety of UAS through Research Excellence (ASSURE) leads the center. The Alliance includes top UAS universities from three countries and more than 100 government and industry partners. Insitu leaders also noted the rare confluence of experimental airspace located in proximity to a

Above: Boeing’s unmanned aerial vehicle subsidiary Insitu held a grand opening in Starkville in October 2017. PHOTO COURTESY OF INSITU

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Welcome to the Knowledge Economy

WELCOME TO OLE MISS

The University of Mississippi has a proven track record of partnering with industry to foster innovation and create economic opportunity for all. No wonder world-class companies come to the university to conduct original research, develop future leaders and drive new ideas. For example:

- In collaboration with Toyota, faculty at the university’s Center for Manufacturing Excellence teaches the Toyota Production System, developing future industry professionals with both manufacturing and business skills.

- The university’s excellence in biomedical and pharmaceutical research is reflected in its collaborations with the Mayo Clinic and St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, its designation by the USDA as a Center for Excellence in Botanicals and its partnership with USAID.

- The 62,000 square-foot Innovation Hub at Insight Park provides office and lab space for companies such as General Atomic, which is collaborating with the National Center for Physical Acoustics, in innovation research such as atmospheric, oceanic and material structural-acoustics.

- University faculty and students work closely with GE Aviation to support an initiative that improves employee quality of life by developing better nutrition and fitness skills.

Ole Miss has long earned a reputation for nationally ranked academic programs and a celebrated campus. It provides research, professional workforce development and leadership to be a major contributor to economic development throughout the state and the nation.

For more information, call William Nicholas, at 662-915-2526 or visit economicdevelopment.olemiss.edu.
hub of young talent and research programs.

“We are investing time, talent and resources in Mississippi to develop industry-leading technology that can safely operate in the National Airspace System,” said Insitu President and CEO Ryan M. Hartman, noting that his team believes “there are many opportunities in Mississippi” and the collaboration with the school and the Mississippi Development Authority in finding the perfect landing pad. “Leveraging our collective experiences as research institutions and industry leaders is vital to the successful and safe integration of UAS into the national airspace.”

MSU already was a known entity to Boeing, which in June 2015 chose the school’s Raspet Flight Research Laboratory (part of the Bagley College of Engineering) for the company’s Stitched Resin Infused Composite Research Center. The university also hosts the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center (NSPARC), a Cray supercomputer, Shadow, that is one of the 20 fastest academic supercomputers in the nation; and the Center for Advanced Vehicular Systems (CAVS), which along with the CAVS Extension in Canton has generated over $6 billion in economic impact since it was created 15 years ago to support Mississippi’s growing automotive industry.

‘TRANSFORMATIVE POWER’

Insitu is situated at the Ralph E. Powe Center for Innovative Technology in the Thad Cochran Research, Technology and Economic Development Park on campus. The company, which also has offices in the UK and Australia, creates and supports unmanned systems and software technology. Insitu’s new facility will support engineering, software development and customer-support services, and will tap into MSU’s talent pool for its internship program. In addition, Insitu will provide access to its training program, which is based on rigorous FAA and military testing standards, and participate in curriculum development, steering committees and academic mentorship, providing guidance for capstone design problems, coaching and evaluation.

“Mississippi State is committed to working with business and industry to bring high-tech jobs to our state that benefit not only our graduates, but enhance economic opportunity for every Mississippian,” said Mississippi State University Vice President for Research and Economic Development David Shaw. “Our partnerships with Insitu and other leading aerospace companies illustrate the transformative power of university-led research and development.”

“Mississippi continues to make significant strides in the aerospace industry, from helicopters and jet fighters for our nation’s military to unmanned aircraft systems,” said Governor Phil Bryant. “Insitu further strengthens Mississippi’s position as a leader in the industry and paves the way for continued innovative research and growth in this innovative field.”

Having surpassed the 20,000-student level every year since 2011, Mississippi State welcomed a record 21,184 students to campus in fall 2017.

MSU’s research expenditures totaled $210 million in 2014, accounting for more than half of the total $410 million in R&D expenditures reported by all Mississippi institutions.
Unemployment Rate

Mississippi’s unemployment rate has decreased slightly faster than the US average since January 2010, decreasing by nearly 6% since then.

Real Per Capita Personal Income

*Real per capita personal income in Mississippi has increased by more than 9% since January 2010.

High School Graduation Rate

*Mississippi’s high school graduation rate has increased by nearly 10% since 2012, more than double the national average.

64 Mississippi high schools received medals in US News’ 2017 Best High School rankings.

Ranked No. 1 for Cost of Living for the past 3 years.

3rd lowest unemployment rate for disabled adults in the US.

Mississippi ranks number 1 for Cost of Doing Business.

CNBC’s America’s Top States for Business 2017

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The City with Soul

MAYOR’S GOAL IS TO MAKE JACKSON THE MOST
BUSINESS-FRIENDLY CITY IN THE SOUTH.

What have been the City of Jackson’s three biggest economic development accomplishments during your tenure as Mayor?

LUMUMBA: Three new residential/ mixed use projects have been approved for the downtown area during the past two months. We have two new museums opening in December. There has been a major expansion of The District Mixed-Use development with the headquarters of BankPlus. We broke ground for a Hilton-Homewood hotel in Fondren. A major expansion of the Batson’s Children’s Hospital is about to commence.

How involved personally do you get in recruiting companies to come and locate in Jackson?

LUMUMBA: We are very involved, and we have an excellent team that offers all forms of assistance to businesses.

What do you feel are Jackson's biggest assets when it comes to appealing to prospective employers?

LUMUMBA: Our biggest assets are our eight educational institutions, proximity to all governmental institutions, our well-trained workforce, regional medical centers, air and water quality, regional airport and rail connectivity.

The City with Soul

by RON STARNER

The 14-year-old Lumumba has prioritized community investment and economic development during his tenure as mayor, and those efforts are paying big dividends for the city of 175,000 people and anchor of a metropolitan area that counts roughly 550,000 residents.

In the following interview, the mayor outlines his city’s chief accomplishments of the recent past and top goals for the year ahead.

What have been the City of Jackson’s three biggest economic development accomplishments during your tenure as Mayor?

LUMUMBA: Infrastructure investment, job growth, perception of crime, blighted housing.

What are your top economic development priorities for the City of Jackson for the coming year?

LUMUMBA: (1) An infrastructure that supports all businesses. (2) A significant increase in small business development. (3) Jackson becoming the most business-friendly city in the South. (4) Mixed-income human scale development.

What are the biggest economic challenges facing your city today?

LUMUMBA: Infrastructure investment, job growth, perception of crime, blighted housing.

Where Resilience Resides

THE SIXTH LARGEST CITY IN MISSISSIPPI, MERIDIAN BOASTS A POPULATION OF 41,148 PEOPLE AND ANCHORS A METROPOLITAN AREA OF 107,449 RESIDENTS.

Strategically located on Interstate 20 between Jackson and Birmingham, Meridian — affectionately called the Queen City — is not just the hub of commerce for East Mississippi; it’s a vital link in the nation’s transportation and logistics network.

The sixth largest city in Mississippi, Meridian boasts a population of 41,148 people and anchors a metropolitan area of 107,449 residents. That population gets a sizable boost from two military facilities, Naval Air Station Meridian and Key Field, which combined employ more than 4,000 citizens. Some 126,500 people live within a 65-mile radius of Meridian.

by RON STARNER

Principle industries in the area include Atlas Roofing, Tower Automotive, Sara Lee Bakery, Mitchell Distributing, Magnolia Steel, Southern Pipe & Supply, Newell Paper, Structural Steel Services and Van Zyerden Inc. In economic development, the Entertainment Center (MAEC) — a distinction that comes naturally to the city. Jimmie Rodgers, known as the Father of Country Music and the Singing Brakeman, was born in Meridian. Other notable personalities who hail from Meridian include Susan Akin, who was crowned Miss America in 1986; James Chaney, an activist who was one of three civil rights workers murdered in 1964; and Hartley Peavey, founder of Peavey Electronics which is headquartered in Meridian.

Sela Ward, who won an Emmy Award for acting in the hit TV drama Once and Again in 2000 and for her role in Sisters in 1994, also is from Meridian. Located in the North Central Hills region of Mississippi, Meridian offers a mild climate year-round, with day-time highs ranging from 60 in the winter to 90 in the summer.

The economy of Meridian is diversified, with healthcare, the military and manufacturing operations employing the most workers.

We are streamlining the permitting and licensing processes to minimize time and cost. — Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba

Source: ”We are streamlining the permitting and licensing processes to minimize time and cost.” — Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba
A Haven of Growth Near Memphis
by RON STARNER

One of the fastest-growing cities in the Southeastern U.S., Southaven resides quietly in the outskirts of Memphis, but there’s nothing quiet about its economic might. About $350 million in new development has recently ignited a local economy that’s added 700 new jobs and is poised to hire many more.

Darren Musselwhite, mayor of Southaven, has occupied a front-row seat to this growth. In the following interview, he shares the success stories and offers a glimpse of what’s to come.

What have some of Southaven’s biggest economic development wins of the past two years?

MUSSELWHITE: Tanger Outlets Retail Center was completed in late 2014, bringing about 1,000 jobs as a $100-million development and destination-style shopping center. Industrial development has continued to thrive with an assortment of new developments and expansions adding over $250 million in value and bringing 700 jobs to our city. We have spent a large amount of time planning and discussing pending developments. New street conditions, renovated buildings in the West End District, more pedestrian-friendly options, more recreational opportunities, and a more economically attractive city.

“Southaven has access to the metropolitan amenities of Memphis with safer residential options.” — Southaven Mayor Darren Musselwhite

What is your city’s best-kept secret?

MUSSELWHITE: Many know that we have been one of the fastest-growing cities in the Southeast and we have continued an aggressive plan to improve our city, but we have been able to do this with no property tax increases, while decreasing debt, and increasing fund balance reserves over 300 percent in the last four years. Our city is in outstanding financial condition and has received a back-to-back excellence award in financial reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association for fiscal years 2015 and 2016.

What is your top priority for the city over the next 24 months?

MUSSELWHITE: Aggressive infrastructure improvement, revitalization of our original business district in the West End, parks and recreation enhancement, city-wide beautification, and continued quality economic growth while maintaining public safety and financial stability are the top priorities. Specifically, I want better street conditions, more developable space in the West End District, more pedestrian-friendly options, more recreational opportunities, and a more economically attractive city.

What is your message to business leaders in other parts of the country who are trying to convince them to expand in Southaven?

MUSSELWHITE: We have it all when it comes to a new business location. Southaven has access to the metropolitan amenities of Memphis with safer residential options. We have a great geographic location for transportation infrastructure with the two interstate systems and access to an international airport nearby. Comprehensively, we offer a great place for employees to live.

Mississippi’s Ace in the Hole

With its white-sand beaches, fresh Gulf seafood, resorts, golf courses, historic landmarks, eight casinos and reputation for good, old-fashioned Southern hospitality, Biloxi certainly knows how to play the hand it was dealt.

First settled in 1699, Biloxi’s location on the Mississippi Sound and the Gulf of Mexico made it an important stop along the coast. By the 1880s, the area had already become a tourist destination — and still is to this day. In fact, the Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport serves nearly 800,000 travelers annually and is the state’s second largest. “The Biloxi brand is 318 years of multigenerational hospitality refinement,” says Cliff Kirkland.

What is your top priority for the City of Biloxi?

MUSSELWHITE: Aggressive infrastructure improvement, revitalization of our original business district in the West End, parks and recreation enhancement, city-wide beautification, and continued quality economic growth while maintaining public safety and financial stability are the top priorities. Specifically, I want better street conditions, more developable space in the West End District, more pedestrian-friendly options, more recreational opportunities, and a more economically attractive city.

What is the brand identity of Biloxi?

MUSSELWHITE: We are known as a safe, suburban city with many residential options that has kept a small-town charm while having access to metropolitan amenities. We like this identity, but I would like to see us become the new home to more corporate headquarters. I believe we are a great prospect for this with the quality of life that we offer for employees and our incredible geographic location in the “crossroads” of two major interstate systems (I-10 and I-55) and within a very short distance to an international airport.

What is your message to business leaders in other parts of the country who are trying to convince them to expand in Biloxi?

MUSSELWHITE: We have it all when it comes to a new business location. Biloxi has access to the metropolitan amenities of Biloxi with safer residential options. We have a great geographic location for transportation infrastructure with the two interstate systems and access to an international airport nearby. We have the newest schools with the most advanced equipment and the best trained staff,” says Kirkland. “We are developer friendly and offer a quality of life unsurpassed in the Gulf South. On his third day in office in June 2015, Mayor Andrew Gilich met with Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant to discuss the mayor’s No. 1 priority — improving security at nearby Keesler Air Force Base, the region’s top employer. The mayor outlined his objective to update the base’s historic entrance on White Avenue to meet security guidelines set forth by the Department of Defense, Homeland Security and the U.S. Air Force. Biloxi worked with state legislators, Keesler and the U.S. Air Force to facilitate a $35-million gate project that included the redevelopment of a four-lane road leading from I-10 to the new gate. The redevelopment also created a corridor for new retail, residential and commercial developments.

“Building a new entry gate to remove that security deficiency has established new architectural guidelines for hotel development in central and east Biloxi, which require developers to adhere to the city’s historic look from the early- to mid-20th century. Mayor Gilich also has facilitated new single-family residential development in north Biloxi and is coordinating a redevelopment of the old seafood factory area in east Biloxi, which will include expansions and updates of existing city marinas and harbors.”

No matter which way you look at it, locating in Biloxi is a good bet.
in Greenville, Mississippi, on the Mississippi River about 2.5 hours south of Memphis and 2 hours west and north of Jackson.

“We have formulated a plan to recruit companies to come into the region and it is called Delta Strong,” says Karlson. “Our region has a workforce of 300,000 people, and we have a strong base of manufacturing and agriculture.”

From Uncle Ben’s Rice to USG Interiors to Toyota, manufacturers love the Delta region and its workforce, notes Karlson. “Our targets right now are metal working and food processing, but we also have a strong base in automotive,” he adds. “We are focused on showing prospects the availability of the region’s workforce with the ACT Work Ready program here. It has helped us with our existing industries, and we are not done.”

The Delta communities of Tunica, Coahoma, Washington, Sunflower and Yazoo City are all at certification or are almost there, says Karlson. “We have more than 840 silver certificates here in Washington County. We have 2,000-plus silver certificates in the surrounding area including our county. We have reached 95 percent of our goal.”

USG likes the region so much that it recently announced it will open a new research center in the area.

“It all comes down to training, and companies know that our region is as committed to training its workforce as any place in the country,” says Karlson.

“Mississippi Delta Community College in Moorhead serves our area. Capps Technology Center does our workforce training. We have the talent to be able to do most jobs; and we have several very good sites and buildings.”

Karlson adds that “we have the central location in the country that you need with airport service, including non-stop flights to Nashville and Dallas out of Greenville.”

“Businesses needing a break from onerous taxes in other parts of the country will find a location that rolls out the welcome mat for them in the Delta, adds Karlson. “Delta Strong is going to help us in our recruiting,” he notes, “especially in high-tax states.”
East Mississippi was looking for confirmation of its business attractiveness, BWI Companies Inc. supplied it in a big way last year when the Texarkana firm cut the ribbon on a new 80,000-square-foot facility in Marion.

A Texas-based company that sells lawn and garden products, BWI will employ 40 people when the $5-million building opens for business.

Company owner Robert Bunch says he has no doubt that BWI will succeed in East Mississippi. “It’s going to be very successful here,” he told a local TV news crew upon BWI’s arrival in Marion. “We’re going to be able to service the Mississippi market down into Louisiana and all over into Alabama, so this location here will operate a fleet of 18-wheelers and sales people and they’ll be able to cover about a 300-mile radius.”

BWI is not alone. All around East Mississippi, expanding companies are moving into newly developed industrial parks to take advantage of access to Interstate 20 in a place billed as the “Strategic Transportation Center of the South.”

Through its annual Warehouse Network Study, Chicago Consulting has regularly recognized Meridian, Mississippi, as a top location for distribution in the Southeast U.S.

Located about halfway between Jackson and Tuscaloosa, the Meridian MSA and the surrounding East Mississippi region serve logistics markets across the Deep South.

Meridian is located within a day’s drive of 55 percent of the U.S. population and sits at the intersection of two major interstates (20 and 59), three U.S. highways (11, 45 and 80), and two major state highways (19 and 59).

Meridian is just 297 miles from Atlanta; 154 from Birmingham; 493 from Dallas; 231 from Memphis; and 202 from New Orleans.

East Mississippi has been recognized as having the fifth-best highway system in the U.S. and the best among the Southeastern states. Four rail carriers serve Meridian. Two are major Class One railroads – Norfolk Southern and Kansas City Southern. Two are short-line railroads – Meridian Southern and Meridian & Bigbee.

In addition to superior road and rail connectivity, the Meridian Regional Airport’s 10,000-foot runway, with two instrument landing approaches, is the longest public-use runway in the state. The airport provides commercial air service by American Eagle ExpressJet.

Prime development sites are available at five area business parks: South Industrial Park, Central Industrial Park, I-20/59 Industrial Park, the Kewanee Mega-Site and GV, Sonny Montgomery Industrial Park. All are either immediately on or near I-20.

Growing companies will also find plenty of qualified help in the market. A recent workforce study conducted by The Pathfinders found that the East Mississippi labor shed – lying within a 65-mile radius of Meridian and reaching east into West Alabama – has a population of 526,500 people and a civilian labor force of 234,200.

The largest employers in the region are the Meridian Naval Air Station (3,000 military and civilian personnel), Rush Health Systems (1,465 workers) and Anderson Regional Health System (1,341 workers).

Major industrial employers in the area include Asurion, which employs 420 workers at an inbound customer contact center; Avery Products, which employs 250 workers in office products and distribution; and Peavey Electronics, which employs 250 people making amplifiers, guitars and sound equipment.

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Snapshots from the Waterfront

by ADAM BRUNS

Plenty of the past can be found along Mississippi’s 800 miles of commercially navigable waterways — the Mississippi River, the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway and the deepwater ports at Gulfport and Pascagoula. But there’s plenty of the future too.

The “Port of the Future” is what observers are calling the $950-million redevelopment of Gulfport by the Mississippi State Port Authority. When all is said and done, the port will be able to describe itself another way — as the Gulf of Mexico’s largest shipping facility, located nearly seven miles south of east-west I-10, and exactly 80 miles from Mobile to the east and New Orleans to the west.

In late November 2017, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District released for public review its Record of Decision (ROD) for the Port of Gulfport Expansion Project planned. The project will connect to the port lessening as more and more TEUs come and go by rail (from 5 percent to 10 percent).

That’s not all that’s going on in Gulfport, however. A new $10-million Marine Research Center is set to be completed in early 2018. The $10-million facility will serve as the marine operations and research facility for University of Southern Mississippi’s School of Ocean Science and Technology, while also enhancing the port’s industrial “front door” with a crucial workforce and innovation component for the state’s “blue economy.”

That economy was recently enhanced by the return of Chiquita Fresh North America operations, which left Gulfport for New Orleans for two years before realizing in 2015 it should have stayed all along. The company signed a 40-year lease.

NATCHEZ: MISS LOU’S PORT AND PEOPLE

The Gulf of Mexico is one major resource for the Magnolia State. Big Muddy is another. At the end of the 450-mile route from Nashville known as the Natchez Trace stands the city where the first sawmill on the Big Muddy is another. At the end of the Mississippi Sound, which will be dredged and/or filled for the breaking of a breakwater. The construction of the project is likely to sustain on average 2,700 jobs per year over its five-year construction period, said a 2012 analysis by Parsons Brinckerhoff performed in 2012 — a year when an additional 20-ft. equivalent units (TEU) throughput totaled 210,000. Total economic impact projections include a six-fold jump in employment, wages and state and local taxes.

The eventual goal? Appropriate infrastructure for handling 1.7 million TEUs by 2060. An optimistic growth scenario shows container volumes growing to nearly 500,000 TEUs in 2020 and 702,000 TEUs in 2030, with the burden on highways connecting to the port lessening as more and more TEUs come and go by rail from 5 percent to 10 percent.

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NATCHEZ: MISS LOU’S PORT AND PEOPLE

The Gulf of Mexico is one major resource for the Magnolia State. Big Muddy is another. At the end of the 450-mile route from Nashville known as the Natchez Trace stands the city where the first sawmill on the Big Muddy is another. At the end of the River — an area known as “Miss Lou” — became the first ACT Certified Work Ready Region to stretch across a state line. The program links, aligns and matches a community’s workforce development efforts among the employer, the future employee and education institutions. Counties and parishes can now identify skills gaps and quantify the skill level of the community’s workforce by using the results of the WorkKeys® assessment. Educators can build career pathways that are aligned to the needs of the community’s business and industry.

The certification is based on individuals earning a National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC), and the area employers recognizing the NCRC credential in their hiring processes. From the launch of the program in 2015 to the announcement of the Work

Today the Adams County Port industrial complex has reached capacity thanks to locations and growth from such firms as World Energy, Genesis Energy, Great River

That’s not all that’s going on in Gulfport, however. A new $10-million Marine Research Center is set to be completed in early 2018. The $10-million facility will serve as the marine operations and research facility for University of Southern Mississippi’s School of Ocean Science and Technology, while also enhancing the port’s industrial “front door” with a crucial workforce and innovation component for the state’s “blue economy.”

That economy was recently enhanced by the return of Chiquita Fresh North America operations, which left Gulfport for New Orleans for two years before realizing in 2015 it should have stayed all along. The company signed a 40-year lease.

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In May 2017, the area earned a unique human resources credential to go with its unique geographic location: Adams County, Mississippi, and Concordia Parish, Louisiana, across the river — an area known as “Miss Lou” — became the first ACT Certified Work Ready Region to stretch across a state line. The program links, aligns and matches a community’s workforce development efforts among the employer, the future employee and education institutions. Counties and parishes can now identify skills gaps and quantify the skill level of the community’s workforce by using the results of the WorkKeys® assessment. Educators can build career pathways that are aligned to the needs of the community’s business and industry.

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Ready certification, more than 50 employers in the Miss Lou region recognized the WorkKeys Certificate for future applicants and current employees, and more than 1,000 WorkKeys assessments had been administered to a variety of potential employees, including graduating seniors at area high schools. The achievement came about through the collaboration of Natchez, Inc., Alcorn State University and Concordia Parish Economic Development.

“We are confident that the effort will pay dividends to our existing employers by streamlining hiring practices, cutting costs and reducing turnover,” said Chandler Russ, executive director of Natchez, Inc. “We are equally confident that the certification and the supporting data will aid in our business and industrial recruitment efforts. We have a qualified workforce in many areas and can support this claim with data.”
Naval Construction Battalion Center (Gulfport) — 3.4 MW (11,000 solar panels generating enough power to supply 450 homes); Partners: Hannah Solar and the U.S. Navy.

Hattiesburg — 50 MW (200,000 polycrystalline solar panels, 6,500 homes); Partner: Silicon Ranch Corp.

Sumrall — 52 MW (215,000+ polycrystalline solar panels, 8,000 homes); Partners: DEPCOM Power and D.E. Shaw Renewable Investments

Lauderdale County — 53 MW (570,000+ photovoltaic solar panels, 8,000 homes); Partner: Silicon Ranch Corp.

But that’s just the beginning. Cooperative Energy and Origis Energy USA are nearly done constructing another 52-MW solar farm in Sumrall, which will carry power to the generation and transmission cooperative’s 423,000 members. At completion of the facility in December 2017, the site will encompass approximately 100,000 photovoltaic solar panels.

Cooperative Energy started its solar energy investments in 2016 with five smaller solar installations (100 kW or less) at Member locations across the state — Coahoma (Lyon), Coast (Kiln), Delta (Greenwood), Singing River (Lucedale), and Southern Pine (Taylorville) electric power cooperatives.

The Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA) reports that Mississippi has moved up from No. 37 to No. 32 in total solar power installed. The SEIA projects growth of 719 MW over the next five years, a rate that ranks 44th in the nation. The new projects will certainly boost that installation ranking even higher.

Mississippi Power Renewable Projects Manager Tony Smith says all four projects are

Mississippi Power, the Southern Company utility serving a large swath of the state’s southern tier, has seen its solar power plant portfolio jump from zero megawatts (MW) at the beginning of 2017 to 105 MW, with another 50 MW or so approved by the state’s public service commission. The four projects, creating 900 construction jobs, include:

SURE, YOU CAN CATCH SOME RAYS ON THE COAST, BUT ACCORDING TO SOLAR DEVELOPERS, THE REALLY GOOD SUN IS IN HATTIESBURG.
power-purchase agreements, and the project developers had the ultimate say-so with respect to site selection, considering such factors as ease of power interconnection and property with favorable topography. He says the planets lined up for these projects in part because of large tracts of land available, and because “it’s been explained to me that, in particular in the Hattiesburg area, we have a higher quality of sunshine than we do 60 miles to the south,” due to less humidity.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

One of those large tract owners was Wynn Alexander, 76, owner and CEO of DeSoto Land & Timber in Wiggins, halfway between Gulfport and Hattiesburg. He and some partners bought up about 13,000 acres five years ago.

“My No. 1 function is to buy and sell land,” he says as he steps away from the saws at a mill for making utility poles. Some land has gone for residential plots, and good quail and deer hunting remains a calling card. Then solar came out of the clear blue sky as a result of the Area Development Partnership (Hattiesburg’s economic development agency) working with Origis to find the best spot for its prospective investment.

“The Origis rep came to town, after a few months we came up with an agreement, he did the first 600 acres with Mississippi Power, and before that was over, turned right around and had an option with another parcel about the same size with Cooperative Energy,” Alexander says he has two more parcels also optioned to Origis. (D.E. Shaw acquired the Origis stake in the Mississippi Power project in December 2016.) Meanwhile, solar energy stakeholders are doing their part to boost the economy in Greater Hattiesburg. It starts with tax revenue and commitments such as 25-year operating agreements, but it doesn’t end there. In October 2017, Cooperative Energy and Origis Energy made a joint donation of $25,000 to the Lamar County Education Foundation to support the local school district, and also donated $125,000 to the Mississippi Scholars STEM program and Tech Master tech-prep program, initiatives of the Mississippi Economic Council’s Public Education Forum of Mississippi.

“The Mississippi Scholars and Tech Master programs are of special interest to our company as they will provide pathways for students to great careers with very good incomes, and at the same time Cooperative Energy and its Members will benefit via a trained workforce,” said Johan Vanhee, managing director of Business Development for Origis Energy. “Everybody wins. These programs are in schools located throughout Mississippi, so the entire state benefits — not just one geographic region.”

Brian Useforge, economic development director for Mississippi Power, says site consultants are asking more often about renewable power as part of the energy mix requirements of their corporate site-seeking clients. Solar power has become a significant talking point. “From our perspective as a state, it shows the state has become much more progressive in the area of renewables,” he says. For his part, Alexander says he’s ready to work with more solar developers. “So far they’ve been top-notch,” as financial partners and taxpayers, he says. And having them around for 25-year operating agreements, he adds, “is about as good as any of us could hope for.”

“More and more companies are making the availability of renewable energy a factor in their location decisions. Adding solar power to Mississippi’s fuel mix will provide greater opportunities for the state to attract these companies.”

Brandon Presley, Northern District Commissioner, Mississippi Public Service Commission (and a cousin to Elvis)
WHERE FLIGHT SYSTEMS ARE PERFECTED

MISSISSIPPI’S UNIVERSITIES ARE WHERE TOMORROW’S AEROSPACE RESEARCH IS TAKING PLACE TODAY.

Mississippi’s I-10 corridor is home to two dozen aerospace companies, and it’s only 75 miles from the Louisiana border to Alabama along that Gulf Coast interstate. Proximity to NASA’s Stennis Space Center in Hancock County — the space agency’s primary rocket propulsion testing center — and its Shared Services Center are a draw, but Mississippi itself is a draw to these companies and dozens of other aerospace enterprises throughout the state. These include household names like GE Aviation, Airbus, Boeing, Rolls-Royce, Raytheon and Northrop Grumman. In October 2017, Rolls-Royce marked 20 years of engine testing at Stennis.

This is an important site for us — our people here are doing very important work to help ensure the reliability of new and innovative jet engines that Rolls-Royce brings to market,” said Marion Blakey, president and CEO of Rolls-Royce North America. “We’ve long enjoyed a great relationship with the people of Mississippi, and this anniversary builds upon that partnership.” In addition to the Outdoor Jet Engine Test Facility, Rolls-Royce operates the Rolls-Royce Marine Propeller and Waterjet Foundry in Pascagoula where it machines, manufactures, tests and repairs propellers for the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard. The company also operates a defense regional field office at the Naval Air Station in Meridian.

Aerospace companies large and small find an ecosystem that’s easy to navigate and is replete with resources for aerospace concerns of any size. This is particularly the case where unmanned aerial systems are concerned. Mississippi State University (MSU) in Starkville is the only FAA-designated UAS Centers of Excellence. The university is leading a research team of 20 universities and more than 100 government and industry partners in research geared to integrating UAS into commercial airspace. The initiative is called ASSURE. MSU also is home to the Raspet Flight Research Laboratory, a leading research, development and testing center for manned and unmanned vehicles and composite materials.

MISSISSIPPI CORNERS THE UAS MARKET

Insitu opened its new facility in Starkville in October; it creates and supports unmanned systems and software technology that deliver end-to-end solutions for collecting, processing and delivering information. At MSU, it supports a combination of engineering, software development and business development/customer service support functions. The company’s partnership with the FAA Center of Excellence for UAS creates 25 jobs.

“We are fortunate to be able to collaborate with Mississippi State University, the Mississippi Development Authority, and many others to establish our facility here, while acting as a representative with ASSURE, to help shape the future of unmanned aircraft regulation,” said Insitu President and CEO Ryan Hartman. “Leveraging our collective experiences as research institutions and industry leaders is vital to the successful and safe integration of UAS into the national airspace.”

Northrop Grumman is adding a mix of new work to its Unmanned Systems facility in Jackson County, including sub-assembly work for the F-35 program. This $272 million investment will create 60 jobs in the coming years.

A UAS Pilot Training Program can be found at Hinds Community College, through a partnership with Pearl River Community College and the Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center in south Mississippi. Companies manufacturing UAS in Mississippi include Northrop Grumman Unmanned Systems, Aurora Flight Sciences and Stark Aerospace.

In 2015, Boeing selected Mississippi State (home of a Stritched Resin Infused Composite Research Center) and the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) to lead research and development on composites. USM, a leading center of polymer research, serves as a technology incubator for next generation composite material systems.

“Every commercial airplane in the world has at least one part made in Mississippi, and with Boeing’s increased presence in our state, we will help innovate the next generation of technology,” said Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant at the time. “I have no doubt that Mississippi State, Southern Miss, Boeing and the state of Mississippi will all benefit from these partnerships.”

In October, aerospace and defense leader Orbital ATK announced an expansion in Iuka, investing $16.4 million and creating 50 jobs. It will begin production of large composite aerospace structures for its Antares, Pegasus and Minotaur launch vehicles and a large national aerospace and defense program at its 310,000-sq.-ft. facility in the northeast corner of the state.

“Our decision to place this additional work in Mississippi emphasizes Orbital ATK’s commitment to not only our employees and customers, but reaffirms our commitment to the state of Mississippi,” said Vice President and General Manager of Orbital ATK’s Aerospace Structures Division Steve Earl. “We are proud to be able to provide state-of-the-art manufacturing capability in a state with a dedicated and skilled workforce.”

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AEROSPACE

ARE PERFECTED

WHERE FLIGHT SYSTEMS ARE WHERE TOMORROW’S AEROSPACE RESEARCH IS TAKING PLACE TODAY.

by MARK AREND

NASA/SSC Stennis Engine Test

PHOTO COURTESY NASA/SSC

MILES OF POSSIBILITIES

MDOT SUPPORTS

90% of commercial traffic

60% of statewide traffic

72 AIRPORTS | 2,500 RAIL MILES

16 PROVIDERS | 25 PUBLIC TRANSIT PROVIDERS

MDOT MAINTAINS

30,000 HIGHWAY MILES

5,827 BRIDGES

THE DRIVING FORCE OF A STRONG ECONOMY
early, 1,200 sets of eyes watched on as Ima Black cracked a bottle of sparkling wine across the bow of her husband’s namesake. The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer was named in honor of her late husband of 50 years, Delbert D. Black, a WWII veteran who served during the attack on Pearl Harbor and the first Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy. Delbert Black died in 2000.

“This is a ceremony that we’ve all been looking forward to for a long time,” Black, the ship’s sponsor, said at the November christening in Pascagoula, Mississippi. “My message to the shipbuilders has always been ‘Hurry up! I’m running out of time.’ Well, look at me. I made it! I made it! I made it! Today, I’m thinking of my husband. I’m wishing that he was standing here instead of me. However, I know that his spirit is anchored in the hull of this ship. Now let us christen this ship and get her ready to join the fleet, where she belongs.”

Huntington Ingalls Industries is the country’s largest military shipbuilding company and has built more ships in more ship classes than any other US naval shipbuilder for more than a century. The company has delivered 29 other Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, which are known for being highly capable ships used in a variety of operations in both war and peacetime, to the Navy.

“Well, look at me. I made it! I made it! I made it! I made it! Today, I’m thinking of my husband. I’m wishing that he was standing here instead of me. However, I know that his spirit is anchored in the hull of this ship. Now let us christen this ship and get her ready to join the fleet, where she belongs.”

Black enlisted in the Navy in 2000.
Mississippi Development Guide

Mississippi’s workforce, location, and access to the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River provide shipbuilders with an unmatched opportunity to grow. Some of the most well-known shipbuilders in the world call Mississippi home: Trinity Yachts, Gulf Coast Shipyard Group, GulfShip, Northrop Grumman, Signet Marine, United States Marine. VT Halter Marine, also in Pascagoula, is the largest designer and builder of medium-sized vessels in the world.

March of 1941, and over the years he served in three wars and on nearly a dozen ships, spending 21 of his 30 years in the Navy at sea,” said Ingalls Shipbuilding President Brian Cuccias. “Ingalls’ ships are built for men and women like Master Chief Black with one goal in mind: to protect the brave Americans who protect our freedom.”

Huntington Ingalls Industries is the largest industrial employer in Mississippi, with about 33,500 people, through its Ingalls Shipbuilding division in Pascagoula. The company operates on 800 acres of land along the Pascagoula River where it builds ships for the surface Navy fleet, US Coast Guard, US Marine Corps as well as several foreign and commercial customers.

The US Department of Transportation ranked Mississippi among the Top 5 States for Shipbuilding in 2013. More than 23,450 workers are employed by more than 33 shipbuilding-related manufacturing companies in the state. Mississippi offers shipbuilders access to more than 15 ports in the state, along the Gulf Coast, Mississippi River and the Tennessee Tombigbee Waterway. The Port of Gulfport and Port Pascagoula are ranked among the top 20 ports in the US for foreign cargo volume.

Huntington Ingalls Shipbuilding division in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

PHOTO BY LANCE DAVIS

Irma Black christens the destroyer named for her late husband, Delbert D. Black.

PHOTO BY ANDREW YOUNG

Background Images: Getty Images

LAND(ING) CLEARED!

Over 300 acres ready for development.

The Tunica Airport located just south of Memphis and minutes from Interstate 69 is primed for growth. The publicly-owned 300-acre manufacturing site is complete with utilities as well as accessible to an 8,500 ft. runway. Contact us today and we’ll show you how to land on a winner in Tunica!

60 MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT GUIDE
OEMs, Suppliers Step on the Gas

Toyota Motor Manufacturing Mississippi is marking its 10-year anniversary in the Magnolia State with some new construction — a $10 million visitor and interactive training center at its Blue Springs plant, specifically. There are 1,550 employees working at the 2 million-sq.-ft. plant, which opened in 2011, making Corolla sedans. The facility was announced in February 2007.

Toyota also announced two donations totaling $175,000 during the anniversary celebration. The contributions focus on investing in the next generation through programs for STEM and family literacy. A $75,000 gift was given to the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) to establish a Toyota Family Learning program in Tupelo. It is being implemented at three Family Resource Center of Northeast Mississippi sites. Toyota has partnered with NCFL for 26 years, investing more than $46 million in the organization’s two-generation literacy model.

The Toyota USA Foundation also donated $100,000 to Mississippi BEST (Boosting Engineering Science and Technology) Robotics at Mississippi State University. The program exposes middle and high school students to the engineering-design process. The students participate in a six-week robot-building program where they design, build and present their creation during a business and marketing competition. Toyota Mississippi has worked with local schools over the past six years to increase participation in the program by students and mentors. The donation is the largest ever made to Mississippi BEST Robotics, highlighting Toyota’s commitment to investing in programs that encourage students to participate in STEM fields.

Toyota is one of two OEMs in the transportation sector, the other being Nissan. In September, Nissan announced its Canton Vehicle Assembly Plant will build the next-generation Nissan Frontier. It currently produces six models: Frontier, Murano, TITAN, TITAN XD, NV Cargo and NV Passenger. The facility has an annual production capacity of 450,000 vehicles, and its workforce has assembled more than 3 million vehicles since opening in 2003.

“The Canton team is extremely proud to be the home of Nissan’s trucks,” said Steve Marsh, vice president, Manufacturing, Nissan Canton Vehicle Assembly Plant. “Since moving to Mississippi in 2012, Nissan Frontier has been a leader in its class and received some of the highest honors in the industry for vehicle quality. The dedicated employees here in Canton look forward to building the next generation of one of the best pickup trucks in America.”

The 4.7 million-sq.-ft. Canton plant employs more than 6,000 workers. According to a 2016 study by Mississippi State University, the facility has generated 45,000 direct and indirect jobs statewide. For every job created at Nissan Canton, an average of 1.9 additional jobs are created at other businesses throughout Mississippi.

Suppliers Expand to Keep Pace

As the OEMs grow, suppliers, too, are investing in Mississippi’s transportation sector. In November 2016, FEUER Powertrain GmbH opened its first U.S. manufacturing operation — also its U.S. headquarters — in Robinsonville, in the heart of Mississippi’s gaming industry in the northwest corner of the state. The $140-million project creates 300 jobs. The maker of crankshafts for the automotive and transportation industry announced its plans for the facility in September 2015.

“For FEUER Powertrain the American Dream came true,” said FEUER Powertrain North America President and CEO Dominic Detg. “An innovative and state-of-the-art facility was built on a green field, in the truest sense of the word. We are proud of the fact that despite the usual initial birth pains of a manufacturer, production ramp-up is almost fully completed. It’s a big advantage that we can now respond to the great market potential in North America by serving our customers from a strategic location.”

BorgWarner, a global leader in clean and efficient technology solutions for combustion, hybrid and electric vehicles, is expanding in Water Valley. The $20-million corporate investment is expected to create approximately 75 jobs over the next two years. The expansion will help meet growing demand for advanced transmission technologies, including the award-winning ECO-Launch™ stop/start accumulator and the mini direct-acting variable force solenoid.

And Nissan supplier Calsonic Kansei is investing $16 million at its Canton location. The company employs more than 350, with 42 employees relocating from the Nissan Supplier Park to the new facility. Calsonic is leasing and upfitting a former warehouse in the Madison County Economic Development Authority’s Central Mississippi Industrial Center in Gluckstadt to accommodate the company’s growth.

Since moving to Mississippi in 2012, Nissan Frontier has been a leader in its class and received some of the highest honors in the industry for vehicle quality.

— Steve Marsh, Vice President, Manufacturing, Nissan Canton Vehicle Assembly Plant

by Mark Arend

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2017 Toyota Corolla

TOYOTA/DAVID DEWHURST PHOTOGRAPHY

Mississippi Development Guide
Mississippi Has Landed Two Commercial Vehicle Tire Production Facilities in Recent Years.

The Yokohama Forever Forest tree planting project at Yokohama Tire Manufacturing Mississippi’s West Point facility in October 2017. Photo by Danni Bond

Tires don’t grow on trees, but trees grow where new Yokohama Tire Manufacturing facilities open — lots of them. More than 500,000 saplings have been planted since 2007, when the Yokohama Forever Forest project got underway. Its goals include developing participants’ environmental awareness, helping decelerate global warming, disaster prevention and the formation of environmental conservation forests, and preserving biodiversity.

Tree plantings have been held in 34 Yokohama locations in Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, the United States and Russia, with the participation of more than 53,000 people, including Yokohama Rubber employees and their family members as well as residents of local communities.

The latest site to host a Forever Forest tree planting is West Point, Mississippi, where more than 300 volunteers planted 2,000 saplings on October 7th at Yokohama Tire Manufacturing Mississippi’s (YTTM) new, $100-million commercial truck tire plant, which opened in October 2015. The plant employs 500 and is designed to produce up to 1 million tires annually. The new plant plays a key role in Yokohama’s business strategy, according to Yokohama Tire Corporation (YTC) COO Jeff Barna, who participated in a Q&A with online tire industry publication Traction News on July 7, 2017:

“YTMM represents the ultimate vote of confidence for YTC in the future. I’ve been to the plant recently and was blown away by the state-of-the-art machinery and attention to detail. The plant itself is a marvel of science.”

As a result,” he added, “our customers are being treated to what we believe is one of, if not the highest, quality manufactured tires in the market. YTMM is exclusively focused on TBS [truck and bus] tires for the time being. We are ramping up our demand capacity in the U.S., so there’s still a good bit of toggling between offshore sourcing from other Yokohama plants versus the current output of YTMM. In situations like ramping up production of a new plant, there’s always the temptation to rush the process, which is never a good idea. At YTC, we prefer to get it right as the benefits of longer-term outweigh being hasty. I like how deliberate we are being and know that customer satisfaction and confidence are the ultimate goals. That’s our focus.”

Tire Production’s Next-Gen Plant

Yokohama Tire is one of more than a dozen major automotive and transportation industry suppliers or OEMs in Mississippi, a state with several transportation infrastructure assets ideal for the sector. These include Gulf of Mexico, Tenn-Tom River and Mississippi River ports; the Federal Express cargo hub at Memphis, Tennessee; 10 rail systems with more than 2,500 miles of track, six Interstates; and a central U.S. location.

A central Mississippi location is the site of the Magnolia State’s other major tire production facility — Continental Tire’s $4.45-billion plant near Clinton in Hinds County, just west of state capital Jackson. Announced in November 2016, plant construction is to get under way in early 2018, and completion is forecast for October 2019. It will employ 2,500 at full capacity.

“Building this new facility in Mississippi is a critical part to our growth strategy for the Tire division of Continental, known as Vision 2023,” said Nikolai Setzer, member of Continental’s Executive Board and head of Continental’s global tire business worldwide, at the project announcement. “This is the first new plant, globally, for the truck and bus tire business in more than 10 years.”

“I’ve been to the plant recently and was blown away by the state-of-the-art machinery and attention to detail. The plant itself is a marvel of science.”

— Jeff Barna, COO, Yokohama Tire Corporation

The facility, say company executives, will be Continental’s flagship plant. It will produce tires for trucks, buses and large transport vehicles.

“This plant is a significant step in addressing our commitment to grow our commercial vehicle tire business in North America,” added Paul Williams, Executive Vice President, Continental Commercial Vehicle Tires, the Americas. “We look forward to strong business relationships both with state and local authorities as well as with our suppliers. With the new plant, we have the best environment to even better serve our customers in the Americas.”

In February 2016, Mississippi’s state legislature voted in support of an incentive package worth $261,651,000 through the Mississippi Major Economic Impact Authority for site acquisition and preparation, infrastructure improvement and workforce training. Hinds County contributed $20 million of that. Tax incentives for the 5-million sq.-ft. project include a 25-year income tax exemption, a sales tax exemption and a 25-year withholding rebate. The state’s positive return on this investment is forecast for seven years out — Mississippi and its local communities are more than willing to go long on elav's of this magnitude.

Where Tire Makers Gain Traction

by Mark Arend
Located within the heart of one of the country’s fastest growing regions, distribution companies find everything they need to move goods in Mississippi. Henry Schein Animal Health, the U.S. animal health business of Henry Schein, Inc., a Fortune 300 company, has opened a new 50,000-square-foot distribution center in Stateline Business Park in Southaven, Mississippi. The $1.7-million investment will create 27 jobs and is the company’s 13th warehousing and distribution center.

“The opening of our new distribution center is the result of a great amount of planning and collaboration with the Mississippi Development Authority, and it will greatly enhance our ability to fulfill our mission to provide the best customer experience possible,” said Fran Dirksmeier, President of Henry Schein Animal Health, North America.

A number of other companies, including McLane, Fiskars, McKesson, Five Below, FedEx and Wal-Mart have also found success in Mississippi’s distribution and warehousing arena. Nearby Memphis, Tennessee, is home to FedEx’s US distribution hub just across the northern Mississippi state line. Proximity to the “distribution capital of the world” provides Mississippi shippers with an added advantage.

“North Mississippi’s well-integrated transportation network and ease-of-access to major interstates and highways provide numerous advantages to companies with distribution needs like Henry Schein, allowing them to efficiently meet customer demand and compete successfully worldwide,” said Gov. Phil Bryant.

Mississippi’s location is ideal for distribution companies interested in taking advantage of its proximity to 100 million people or 32 percent of major US populations and business centers within one day’s drive. It also has six interstates, and 14 federal highways. In 2014, Mississippi ranked No. 8 for performance of State Highway Systems.

Indeed, the state offers superb multimodal connectivity in the way of 30 rail care providers and five class 1 railroads, 15 ports and two deepwater ports, as well as two international airports. Railways provide access to 25,000 miles of track leading to Canada, Mexico and the central US, while three state’s ports are strategically positions along the Gulf Coast to allow easy for exporting and importing.

Mississippi also offers incentives to distribution and warehousing companies locating in the state. The Free Port Warehouse Property Tax Exemption allows local governing authorities to grant full exemption on personal property held before being transported.
In the northeastern-most part of Mississippi, rural Tishomingo County is proving to be at the corner of opportunity and industry.

In October, Orbital ATK announced it will invest nearly $10.5 million in an expansion of its 320,000-sq.-ft. (29,728-sq.m.) Iuka facility. The aerospace and defense company will manufacture large composite aerospace structures for launch vehicles and a large national aerospace and defense program. The expansion will create an additional 50 jobs.

“Our decision to place this additional work in Mississippi emphasizes Orbital ATK’s commitment to not only our employees and customers, but reaffirms our commitment to the State of Mississippi,” said Steve Earl, vice president and general manager of Orbital ATK’s Aerospace Structures Division. “We’re proud to be able to provide state-of-the-art manufacturing capability in a state with a dedicated and skilled workforce.”

The news follows a $5 million investment in Ohio the company announced in September, and the June completion of another major expansion in Gilbert, Arizona. The company operates 62 sites nationwide.

BMSI Inc., invested $6 million in a new manufacturing facility in Burnsville where it created 100 jobs. The company located in an existing 20,000-sq.-ft. (1,858-sq.m.) space at Yellow Creek Port South and plans to expand it by another 10,000 sq. ft. (930 sq. m.). The facility will manufacture specialty products for the U.S. Department of Defense, as well as produce commercial restaurant equipment.

“The State of Mississippi, as well as the Tishomingo County Development Foundation and Yellow Port, have made this the obvious choice of locations to build a new facility. We look forward to being a part of the growth and success of the Tishomingo County area,” BMSI President Robby Stephens said at the time of the company’s announcement.

In 2015, Mississippi Silicon built the first silicon metal production facility in the nation in the last 40 years. The $100-million, 174,000-sq.-ft. (16,165-sq.m.) facility in Burnsville, Mississippi, is a joint venture between the Rima Group and CleanTech LLC. According to Mississippi Silicon, the Tishomingo County site was chosen for its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico and “ideal strategic location for taking advantage of the expanding customer base, regional supply chain and stable, competitively priced electricity.”

LISTEN AND LEARN
With such consistent development in the area, having a qualified workforce becomes all the more critical.

Northeast Mississippi Community College (NEMCC) has begun offering free, specialized job training at a manufacturing academy in Tishomingo County at its Iuka campus. The academy is the result of a partnership among NEMCC, Mississippi Silicon, Rural Development Partners, Appalachian Regional Commission and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Greg James, NEMCC Workforce Development manager, says the idea for the academy started about three years ago when industries shared their workforce wish list with the college.

In February the school issued a survey across 200 local businesses. Employers wanted applicants to have more training in 23 skill areas, including specific manufacturing-related skills and general soft skills.

The free academy is broken down into two parts. One is a 45-hour Smart Start course on necessary skills such as applied math, graphic literacy and soft skills. The other is a 50-hour course teaching key manufacturing skills, including precision measurement, high-performance manufacturing and others.

“Our goal is to empower people to be able to get a job anywhere, not just in manufacturing,” said Remington Wilson, NEMCC Workforce instructor. “The skills you learn in this course are applicable to every job. Some of the topics we cover include health and safety procedures on the job, CPR, efficiency methods, precision measuring and interview skills, among others. Graduates of the program earn up to five certifications that employers look for when considering new hires.”
When Hattiesburg-based, chemical and nanotechnology company Hybrid Plastics helped create the world’s first synthetic trachea in 2011, it was a major medical milestone, to say the least. Today, the company is at it again, and is working with the Department of Defense to produce a viscoelastic hemostat that forms a rubbery polymer with blood and helps to buy precious time following a traumatic injury like a gunshot wound.

“When we first moved here, people thought we were dropping off the face of the earth,” says Hybrid Plastics co-founder Joe Lichtenhan. “‘How can nanotech and high-tech come out of Mississippi?’ That was something we were concerned about and we have proven that it can survive and indeed thrive.”

Hybrid Plastics created and manufactures a product known as POSS, which is used in a number of applications including biotech, personal care, cosmetics and coatings. Lichtenhan says part of the reason the company decided to relocate from Southern California 14 years ago, is because of the state’s workforce.

“Technology is sourced globally,” says Lichtenhan. “In that sense, the whole idea of Silicon Valley, where you have a nucleus or a concentration of people, that’s a little bit of an antiquated concept. But in Mississippi we do have something of that that does benefit us. We do a lot of work with and hire a lot of students from our local universities. Southern Miss is really famous worldwide in polymers and coatings. Mississippi State and Ole Miss are really outstanding engineering schools and we have programs with them, and the (University of Mississippi Medical Center) I think the world of. That’s just a fantastic resource the state has.”

MISSISSIPPI BOUND

Hybrid Plastics isn’t the only chemical business to find success in the Magnolia State. Several polymer and chemical companies are located in Hancock County’s Port Bienville Industrial Park including DAK Americas, the largest producer of PET Resin in North America, and SNF Polychem, one of the world’s leading manufacturers of water-soluble polymers. SNF Polychem is investing $5 million in the facility for the manufacture a new desalination product called Flosperse.

“The new unit will add approximately 10 jobs and increase the number of employees on-site by about 15 percent,” said Jim Bishop, the plant manager. He also noted the project will create additional employment opportunities for the community in construction, asset procurement, raw material acquisition and transportation. The project is expected to be completed in early 2018.

B&D Plastics announced in April its decision to invest $750,000 and expand in Gautier, near the Gulf Coast. The company has operated out of its Gautier facility for more than three decades and is one of the largest fabricator and manufacturer of dual-laminate equipment in the country. B&D Plastics will add a 9,375-square-foot production and assembly facility as well as a 7,000-square-foot warehouse on to its existing 50,000-square-foot facility. The expansion will create 35 jobs.

“Since 1983, our Gautier-based company has been engaged in solving complex customer issues relating to the design and manufacture of custom dual-laminate products. B&D Plastics is now one of the largest facilities of its kind,” said B&D Plastics owner Tom Reeves. “We value our relationship with the state of Mississippi, the city of Gautier and the Jackson County Economic Development Foundation and appreciate their support for our expansion.”

Materialistic Mississippi

THE ADVANCED MATERIALS AND PLASTICS SECTORS FIND RESOURCES AND ROOM TO GROW MISSISSIPPI.

by SAVANNAH KING

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ith 19.7 million acres of forests in the state, timber is a major economic driver in Mississippi. The $1.5-billion forestry industry is the second-most valuable agricultural product behind poultry in the state.

“Companies go where they find potential, and they can see Mississippi becoming a great place to grow timber,” said Marc Measells, research and extension associate with the MSU Department of Forestry. “Current growers and people who purchase land for timber now will have a good investment long-term, despite current market conditions.”

The timber market in Mississippi experienced a combination of bad weather and a pine beetle infestation in 2017, but experts in Mississippi say they expect to see the state’s forest product industry experience an upswing over the next few years.

“We’ve got plenty of trees out there right now because the post-recession housing market has been slow to improve, so demand isn’t high,” said
Glenn Hughes, a forestry professor with the Mississippi State University Extension Service. According to the extension office, Mississippi’s forestry, logging, primary wood products and furniture manufacturing account for between $11 billion and $14 billion annually in the state’s economy. As many as 60,000 people are directly employed in logging, forestry and wood-processing, with another 66,000 people working in the industry indirectly.

In addition to producing roundwood, as well as hardwood and softwood used in furniture and flooring production, Mississippi growers sold more than 30,000 trees over the holiday season with the bulk of those — about 95 percent — coming from mostly family-owned choose-and-cut Christmas tree farms. Nearly 80 percent of the timberland in the state is owned by individuals, with the majority of those being family groups.

Hughes notes the opening of the new Biewer Sawmill in Newton County is a positive sign for the industry’s future. The $85 million sawmill, officially known as Biewer Sawmill-Newton LLC, is a state-of-the-art facility that employs 125 workers. The company also has four other sawmill operations, lumber treating and distribution centers in the Midwest.

Another plant has opened three years after an EF-4 tornado ripped through Louisville, Mississippi, and destroyed Winston Plywood and Veneer’s facility. In April, the company celebrated its grand reopening at a new $100 million facility in its hometown. “Winston Plywood and Veneer could have rebuilt its facility anywhere in North America, but the company chose to remain in Louisville — a true testament to the quality of life in Louisville, Winston County and Mississippi,” said Mississippi Development Authority executive director Glenn McCullough, Jr.

The company will ultimately employ 400 people. The company was assisted in site preparation, relocation expenses, infrastructure needs and workforce training by MDA and used disaster recovery funds provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help with construction.

“The grand opening of Winston Plywood and Veneer is evidence of what can be accomplished when business partners with government at all levels to create jobs and spur economic growth,” said Gov. Phil Bryant.
Wile the land and waters along the mighty Mississippi alone are fertile enough to fuel the success and growth of the state’s agricultural industries, the Magnolia State’s crown jewel is its workforce.

Agribusiness is a $7.6-billion industry in Mississippi. Its 36,700 farms cover more than 10 million acres growing everything from soybeans and corn to pecans and cotton and raising cattle, catfish and poultry.

As a right-to-work state with nearly 30 percent of the state’s workforce directly or indirectly working in agriculture, companies have access to a deep pool of talent. Several workforce training programs are offered through Mississippi’s 15 community colleges throughout the state. The Mississippi Community College System has partnered with more than 550 companies to create custom training programs.

Earlier this year, poultry processor Pearl River Foods announced it will locate a new processing plant in Carthage. The $2-million investment will create 150 jobs. The company is leasing a Leake County spec building and The Mississippi Development Authority is providing assistance for building improvements, while the county is helping with infrastructure improvements.
“On behalf of Pearl River Foods, we are thankful to the state of Mississippi, Leake County and the city of Carthage for welcoming our operation,” Phillip Jones, Pearl River Foods partner, said at the company’s announcement. “In a growing poultry industry, Pearl River Foods anticipates a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship between our company, the state and local communities. Our mission is to be a top-quality poultry processor while positively impacting our surrounding community.”

Koch Foods expanded its operations at two facilities with a $2 million investment in Forest and a $33 million investment in Morton. The expansions will create 203 new jobs for the company that currently employs 3,200 people in Scott County.

“As a corporate citizen of Scott County, we are pleased to show our commitment to the growth and prosperity of both our company and our communities,” said Koch Foods COO Mark Kaminsky. “Koch is very pleased to be a part of Scott County and Mississippi and will continue our pursuit of excellence here in the years to come.”

In 2016, Express Grain Terminals announced it would invest $2 million in Greenwood and create 10 new jobs at its agricultural product processing operation. Earlier that year, the company created 55 jobs and invested another $13 million in the state. The Greenwood expansion includes a soybean processing plant that will turn locally grown soybeans into soybean meal and hulls to be used in the state’s animal feed markets.

“Agribusiness is a significant driver in Mississippi,” said Gov. Phil Bryant. “I am glad Express Grain Terminals found the resources and skilled workers needed to grow. This project will help boost the economy in Leflore County and the entire Mississippi Delta region.”

“Agribusiness is a significant driver in Mississippi.”

— Gov. Phil Bryant

**MISSISSIPPI’S TOP AGRICULTURAL CROPS**

- Poultry/Eggs - $2.9 billion
- Forestry - $1.4 billion
- Soybeans - $1 billion
- Cotton - $442 million
- Corn - $436 million
- Cattle - $315 million
- Catfish - $169 million
- Rice - $139 million
- Hay - $127 million
- Sweet Potatoes - $116 million

United States Marine Special Forces are entering combat leaner than ever, thanks in large part to a technology company based in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. Ammunition makers have tried for decades to develop a lighter round that can withstand the extreme demands of the military’s automatic and semi-automatic weapons. MAC Ammunition, LLC has done just that.

The typical brass-encased round in a Marine’s .50 caliber machine gun weighs about 114 grams. Under a $20.0 million Department of Defense contract, MAC has developed and successfully tested a polymer-based round that weighs about 92 grams, 25 percent lighter than previous. The ammo has been in the field for about a year now.

“Twenty-five percent might not sound like a lot,” says Joe Gibbons, MAC’s co-founder and manager. “But it’s huge for the fighters who carry it. And since the fighters aren’t loaded with all that extra weight, the helicopters flying combat support can carry more fuel, and that’s huge, too.” MAC’s polymer round is the result of close cooperation with a decade of research and development at its 30,000-sq.-ft. manufacturing plant in Port Bienville Industrial Park. The company employs 22 people and has the...
MAC Ammunition’s polymer-based machine gun rounds are based on nearly a decade of research and development. SOURCE: MAC AMMUNITION LLC

We are material scientists and chemical engineers who took on the challenge of making lightweight ammunition from a material sciences standpoint.” — Joe Gibbons, Co-founder, MAC AMMUNITION, LLC

Throughout arrangements with distributors, MAC’s lightweight rounds also are being used by police departments. The company’s overseas clients include the defense departments of Poland, Spain and the UK.

“We only sell to the friendlies,” Gibbons assures.

A FRIENDLY STATE FOR FIREARMS

As his name suggests, Philip Gunn, Speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives, is a big backer of the state’s firearms industry, and has led informal efforts to recruit more gun manufacturers.

“In our state,” Gunn wrote to potential recruits, “you will not be criticized for providing goods to the law-abiding citizens who enjoy hunting, shooting, or who just want the peace of mind that comes with the constitutional right to protect their families.”

State laws make Mississippi a firearms-friendly state. It’s one of just nine states in the country where anyone who can legally possess a gun can carry it concealed, even without a license. Along with its neighbor, Louisiana, it’s one of two states that offers a “Second Amendment Sales Tax Holiday,” timed to the start of hunting season.

The holiday exempts a broad range of guns and ammunition from Mississippi’s seven-percent state sales tax. Backers say the loss of tax revenue is offset by a surge of out-of-state sales.

For potential craft brewers, Mississippi is thus a wide-open field. Matthew McLaughlin, an attorney who led the charge to get the beer law changed and finally met with success after winning the backing of the Mississippi Manufacturers Association, suggests that now’s the time to get in.

“In Jackson, which is the largest metropolitan area in the state. We only have one brick and mortar brewery,” says McLaughlin referring to Lucky Town Brewing Co. “Which defies logic in my mind. I think Jackson could support five to ten.”

“Craft beer is the Holy Grail for an economic developer. It’s job creation, it’s tourism, it’s quality of life, it’s heavy investment and it’s manufacturing.” — Matthew McLaughlin, attorney

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Mississippi reached its bicentennial in 2017, it celebrated its rich history with the opening of two new museums.

The Museum of Mississippi History showcases the state’s history from the early days to the present with exhibits including Native American history, the Civil War, natural disasters that have befallen the state and its musical legacy. The Mississippi Civil Rights Museum makes history as the nation’s first state-operated civil rights museum. Mississippi provided $90 million for the construction of the museums and another $19 million was raised through private donations. The museums cover 200,000 square feet — the size of three and half football fields — and share a lobby, auditorium and other spaces.

“All Mississippians can be proud of these two museums, and their statewide impact — both education and economic — will be immediate and lasting,” said MDAH director Katie Blount.

Tour the state and see the stomping grounds of famous musicians, walk in the footsteps of civil rights leaders and share in Mississippi’s unique culture.

by Savannah King

FORGING NEW FRONTIERS.

Now is your time to explore new horizons, forge your own path and let imagination be an engine of creation. Innovators in unmanned aerial systems and aerospace are making Mississippi a leader in the journey to the future. How high will you soar?

Mississippi Pioneering

www.mississippi.org/pioneering
As the “Birthplace of American Music” the entire state is a museum of sorts. Markers throughout the state on the Mississippi Blues Blais and the Mississippi Country Music Trail highlight significant events in American music history, like Elvis’ birthplace in Tupelo, B.B. King’s roots in the Hills region, and the Grammy Museum in Cleveland. The Mississippi Blues trail celebrated the bicentennial by placing its 200th marker. The marker recognizes the first rock’n’roll recording, “Rocket 88,” which reached No. 1 on the Billboard R&B chart in 1951. The marker is located outside of Lyon Town Hall near Clarksdale, Mississippi.

“The Mississippi Blues Trail tracks the inspiration, creation and influence of blues music throughout Mississippi and to locations around the world,” said Visit Mississippi Director Craig Ray. “Our 200th marker recognized how blues music led to rock ‘n’ roll and solidifies the importance of Mississippi as the Birthplace of America’s Music as we celebrate our state’s bicentennial year.”

Every year, tourists from all over the world travel to Mississippi to take in its unique cultural heritage, outstanding southern cuisine and musical legacy. Tourism has a significant impact on the state’s economy, to the tune of about $385.8 million a year for the last decade. “Tourism plays a tremendous role in Mississippi’s economy,” said Gov. Phil Bryant. “Our state’s wealth, tastes and experiences attracted an estimated 25 million visitors last year, contributing to $6.3 billion spent in the state and generating $345.1 million for that state’s General Fund.”

Some 25 million visitors traveled the state in FY2016, a slight increase from the state’s 20-year average of 22 million visitors. Direct employment in the tourism industry was also higher than average for the state in 2016 with 66,000 jobs.

“Nearly 98 percent of people working in travel and tourism in Mississippi are employed in the private sector,” said Mississippi Development Authority Executive Director Glenn McCullough, Jr. “Without travel and tourism, Mississippi would lose more than 124,000 direct and indirect jobs. This is a vital component to our economic health that cannot be outsourced.”

**FOOD**

**COME HUNGRY, LEAVE HAPPY**

**FROM SEAFOOD TO SPICY TAMALEs, CASUAL FARE TO TRENDY, MISSISSIPPI TURNS IT UP.**

By GARY DAUGHTERS

“College towns are excellent for straight up, spirited dining and for sharing milestones and rites of passage over meals that have a way of feeling like home. Oxford, Mississippi, does not disappoint.”

Christina Lawler, a senior at the University of Mississippi, had a milestone moment last October when she accepted the crown awarded to the annual Ole Miss Homecoming Queen. “To celebrate, my parents took me to Oxford Grillehouse,” Lawler says.

In the heart of Oxford’s town square, the Grillehouse is best known for its beef. “Their steaks are phenomenal,” says Lawler. “They’re dry aged and unlike anything in northern Mississippi,” and the sides are awesome. My mom and I both especially love the smoked Gouda mac & cheese.”

Lawler’s take on the buzzing, Oxford food scene is instructive. “The Ravine,” she says, is “the most inventive restaurant in Oxford. All of their food is locally sourced from farms and from their outside garden. Their menu changes seasonally and you can find just about anything.”

**GREENVILLE IS TAMALE CENTRAL**

The Delta Hot Tamale Festival on the banks of the Mississippi River has become such a scene that, in its seventh year, it’s selling out lodging within a half-hour of Greenville. Festival day is the third Saturday of October, but the buildup begins midweek.**

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**DOWNTOWN TUPELO PHOTO BY SHAY LAVVEE**

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From the warm southern sun, to the historic antebellum homes and oak-lined streets, to fresh seafood and live jazz and blues bands, the Magnolia State offers residents a completely unique quality of life.

Whether you choose to locate to the coast, on the banks of the mighty Mississippi, in the state’s urban areas or its small towns, residents can take advantage of the state’s affordability. According to U.S. News and World Report, Mississippi ranked No. 1 in lowest cost of living in 2016. Average home prices are also low across the state with a median home value at $115,600, according to Zillow.

Cities across the state offer a high quality of life and cultural distinction all their own. Bay of St. Louis was named one of the “Coolest Small Towns in America” by Budget and Travel Magazine, while Long Beach earned a spot on the “10 Best Places to Live in Mississippi” list by Movoto. The capitol city, Jackson, was included as one of the “Best Places for Business and Careers” by Forbes.

Mississippi is a favorite location for retirees for its mild winters, and tax-friendly environment. According to Visit Mississippi, there are 13 certified retirement communities in the state that have proven standards inducing low taxes and affordability, quality health care, low crime rates and opportunities for recreation and education as well as cultural experiences.

The state’s 200 years of history provide opportunities for history buffs to walk in the footsteps of those who came before and take in the unique cultural sights and sounds that have developed over the years. If you’re looking for a place where you can spend your weekends deep-sea fishing, playing golf, taking in a show at the casino, exploring Civil War history or enjoying a music festival, look no further than Mississippi.
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<td><a href="http://www.usm.edu/economic-development">www.usm.edu/economic-development</a></td>
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<td>The WORLD FORUM for Foreign Direct Investment</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.worldforumFDI.com">www.worldforumFDI.com</a></td>
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THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE.

www.mississippi.org/workforce

Toyota is celebrating the 10-year anniversary of locating in Mississippi. Mississippi’s productive workforce and customizable training programs — providing a quality workforce now and well into the future — were two of the top reasons why the automotive giant chose the Magnolia State. Factor in $50 million Mississippi Works training fund, and it is no surprise Toyota and many other companies have found a home in Mississippi.