MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT GUIDE
Mississippi Community Colleges
We are Advanced Training for a Powerful Workforce

The Mississippi Community College Board fosters an environment of excellence for the state’s 15 community colleges, which promotes world-class education and skills training. Mississippi’s community college workforce training programs offer a flexible, innovative, and responsive system for skills development that provides Mississippi’s industries with a clear competitive advantage, and assures the state’s workforce has the opportunity to build economic security and an improved quality of life.

Mississippi Community College System

**Employer Services**
- Job Analysis and Assessment
- Workplace Basic Skills
- Industry Specific Pre-Employment Training
- Customized Skills Training
- Total Quality Management
- Advanced Skills Training
- Mobile Classrooms

**Employee Services**
- Career Counseling
- Job Referrals
- Basic Skills/High School Equivalency Diploma Preparation
- Pre-Employment Training
- Referrals to Full-Time Career and Technical Programs
- Short-Term Adult Training
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601.432.6518
Thrive on the cutting edge

When considering a new industrial or commercial site for your next venture, readiness is critical. With strong community partnerships, seasoned industry insight and a commitment to driving continued economic growth in Southeast Mississippi, our team is poised to work with you to strategically optimize your time to market.

Mississippi Power
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

mississippipowerED.com
Business Climate Overview
Business in Mississippi is booming after a year of unique challenges revealed the state’s pro-business climate and affordability.

Interview with the Governor
Governor Tate Reeves discusses his first year in the state’s highest office, from navigating the pandemic to attracting new business.

Interview with MDA Leadership
Recently appointed MDA Director John Rounsaville shares his perspective on Mississippi’s famously pro-business climate.

Statistical Profile
A look at Mississippi in facts and figures.

Higher Education
Local employers partner with universities and community colleges to engineer a better workforce.

Workforce
Building up the state’s workforce is a full-time job, and the Office of Workforce Development’s new leader has hit the ground running.

Research & Development
From launching rockets into space to developing plant medicine, Mississippi’s innovative spirit is reaching new heights.

Region Profiles
A look at Mississippi’s four largest cities/regions and the diverse people and industries that call them home.

Utilities
Mississippi’s three large utility companies cater to the needs of growing businesses.

Ports & Waterways
From Gulf Coast ports to the Mississippi River, the state offers easy access to markets throughout the Americas.

Clean Energy
A series of investments in solar energy are charging the state’s clean energy sector.

Aerospace
Multiple aerospace operations are blasting off in Mississippi thanks to key ties to NASA and favorable policies.
CREATING opportunities. BUILDING OUR FUTURE.

At the University of Mississippi, we create opportunities. We equip Mississippians with the **education, research, and facilities** they need to build a better future for our state. Through established relationships with business and industry as well as local, state and regional partners, we fuel prosperity and drive economic development.

Seeking access to an innovative workforce and top-notch research facilities? Join us in building Mississippi's legacy.

Call William Nicholas at 662-915-2526 or visit economicdevelopment.olemiss.edu.
51 | Shipbuilding
More than 33 shipbuilding-related manufacturers employ more than 23,450 skilled workers in Mississippi.

54 | Automotive
From manufacturing tires to engines and armored vehicles, Mississippi is squarely in the Southeast’s automotive sweet spot.

56 | Distribution & Warehousing
Proximity to the FedEx air cargo facility in nearby Memphis and easy access to major interstates, highways and waterways make northern Mississippi a key location for warehousing and distribution operations.

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David Rumbarger has been in economic development long enough to see just about everything, but he never witnessed anything like what 2020 delivered.

As President and CEO of the Community Development Foundation in Tupelo, Mississippi, Rumbarger was called upon to serve on the front lines in the battle against COVID-19 and the enormous economic toll it took on his community.

“It was definitely a strange and different year,” he says. “Initially, when COVID-19 first began to spread, many thought the precautions and measures would be temporary. But almost weekly, there was a new wrinkle thrown in. Suddenly, we were contending with questions like, how do you handle PPE and quarantining? How do you reopen your plant in segments? How will they come back online? Then came the PPP loan program for small businesses, and a lot of our banks stayed open 12 hours a day to help people get the PPP funding they needed to save their businesses.”

For a community that has 21% of its adult workforce employed in manufacturing jobs, these assistance programs were vital for survival.

But Tupelo, much like the rest
of Mississippi, didn’t just survive the global pandemic; it thrived. BancorpSouth Bank and Cadence Bancorporation merged to form one bank, Cooper Tire merged with Goodyear, and business kept booming in northern Mississippi.

“Business in Lee County has been back full bore since Christmas,” says Rumbarger. “Our state is pretty wide open for business now. Google came to DeSoto County during the height of the pandemic. Amazon located two projects in Mississippi following the changing of the state flag; and Hotel Tupelo, a high-end suites hotel, opened in downtown Tupelo. Our pipeline has really filled up since January, and those projects are on a shorter time frame than before the pandemic.”

The same could be said of the whole state. A review of the Conway Data Analytics projects database shows that Mississippi landed 48 corporate facility expansion deals in 2020. These ranged from a $300 million investment by Associated Wholesale Grocers in Hernando in DeSoto County to a million-dollar life sciences investment by Quantum Research International in Tupelo.

Having the nation’s second-lowest cost of doing business is a huge draw for Mississippi, but so is a workforce of 1.267 million people that are highly trained and motivated. A right-to-work state, more than 22,000 workers received specialized training in Mississippi last year. Statewide, 136,534 people are employed in manufacturing jobs at 2,366 different companies.

The largest segment of manufacturing workers are employed in the production of motor vehicles and parts. One of the biggest employers in the state in this sector is Toyota, and its plant in Tupelo is showing no signs of slowing down.

“Toyota had just finished a model change and hired 200 people in the...
prior two years,” Rumbarger says. “They make the Corolla at their plant in Tupelo. That is the planet’s best-selling car. Some 500,000 Corollas are built here each year. And they are constantly looking at the market for electric vehicles.”

Coming out of the pandemic, Rumbarger says Mississippi is poised to boom even more through the remainder of 2021. “I am bullish on the year ahead right now,” he says. “We are conducting on-site visits now. We had been doing virtual visits until March, but people in various industries are now trying to get ahead of what the economy is going to do. There is still capacity in industry now. International FDI went away for about a year, but it is back now. We are going to see a real explosion this summer and fall.”

Rumbarger says the appeal of Mississippi is readily apparent to manufacturers and logistics end-users. “In America, we are located right in the middle of Texas and Florida, two of the fastest growing markets in the country,” he says. “We are just 4 hours from Atlanta and 2 hours from Birmingham. Our interstates connect us directly to Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, Georgia and Florida. For business, this is the place to be.”

Mississippi landed 48 corporate facility expansion projects in 2020.

Source: Conway Data Analytics

Tupelo street performers
PHOTO BY ROB HAIRSTON, CDFMS.ORG
MISSISSIPPI'S GOVERNOR SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATES CHALLENGING FIRST YEAR AND BUILDS MOMENTUM FOR THE STATE’S FUTURE.

by SAVANNAH KING
Governor Tate Reeves was only months into his first year as Mississippi’s governor when the global COVID-19 pandemic threw a wrench into the gears of commerce. Even as the economy slowed and businesses hit pause on new investments, Reeves was undaunted, staying focused on his primary goal of creating a business climate that will create quality jobs for Mississippians.

His bold approach seems to be paying off. Not only did the state create 5,000 new jobs in 2020, but momentum is continuing to build in Mississippi in 2021.

In the following interview, Governor Reeves discusses his first year of serving in the state’s highest office, navigating the pandemic, strengthening the workforce and attracting new business.

**You were sworn in just months before the start of the pandemic, how would you say Mississippi fared compared to others across the country?**

**Governor Tate Reeves:** In terms of economic development and announcements, Mississippi did not slow down. Our team helped foster $1.63 billion in new investment in 2020, which was a 45% increase over the previous year. We created more than 5,000 new jobs! For small businesses, we helped them keep their doors open and encouraged Mississippians to support Main Street in a responsible way. While 2020 was a challenge, I’m proud of how our people navigated the year.

**What are some the biggest lessons you took from the last year?**

**Reeves:** Mississippians are resilient. We’ve experienced our share of natural disasters from Hurricane Katrina to tornadoes to flooding from the Mississippi River. This pandemic brought out the same strength in our people. Neighbors continued to check on neighbors. People made sure to stop by their locally owned shop or restaurant — if only at the takeout window — and support their community. If you locate your company here, you’re going to be part of a community, and I’m proud of that.

**How would you describe the state’s business climate today?**

**Reeves:** We’re open for business. Our team is even more aggressive than last year in terms of recruiting and bringing in projects. When you call our business recruitment team, you’re going to find responsive individuals on the other end of the phone who are eager to meet your needs and bring jobs here. Our advantages remain constant. We have reliable, affordable energy, a permitting system that can help you quickly go from site selection to groundbreaking and a responsive workforce training system.

**You’ve had a focus on education from the beginning. How are expanded programs like computer science helping to deepen the state’s talent pool? What else is on the horizon?**

**Reeves:** I’m proud of my record on education. We’ve seen tremendous gains in reading and math skills among our students compared to their peers in other states. That’s because of the hard work of our educators, parents and students along with reforms we implemented. If you raise the bar, Mississippi children will surpass expectations. We’ve seen strong performance and job placement from coding academies around the state and expanding computer science is simply another step in our efforts to strengthen our education system. We’re always evaluating new ideas to create a flexible, prepared workforce for the future.
In August, you launched the ReSkill Mississippi Initiative to help the state’s displaced workforce. Within a month more than 2,000 Mississippians had already enrolled. Tell us how you’re using programs like this to help people get back to work?

**Reeves:** Programs like ReSkill Mississippi are an example of how responsive we are to the needs of employers. A scalable, trained workforce is a priority because I know when a company opens its doors, it needs employees who are ready to go on Day One. We are constantly talking with employers and educators to make our workforce training programs the best in the nation.

Mississippi is one of a growing number of states opting out of future unemployment funds from the federal government. What message do you want to send to businesses and workers in the state?

**Reeves:** Mississippi is ready to get back to work. Whether you’re a restaurant or a large distribution center, you’ve got to meet the demands of your customers — those orders aren’t slowing down. I’ve heard from numerous employers across the state, and they’re all saying the same thing — they want more workers! I look forward to Mississippians returning to the workforce to keep our economy going strong.

What’s the biggest misconception people have about your state and how do you intend to combat those misconceptions with potential newcomers to the state?

**Reeves:** I think those outside the state are simply unaware of all Mississippi has to offer. We test rocket engines on the Gulf Coast. We’re home to several U.S. Department of Defense research programs, including a U.S. Army supercomputer in Vicksburg. It’s a message we’re working to spread. I’ll tell you, once people visit our state and experience our hospitality — especially our food — they fall in love. They want to return again and again.

As a lifelong Mississippian, how would you say the state’s brand identity has changed since you took office?

**Reeves:** Mississippi is a pro-business state, and that hasn’t changed. We are working to improve our tax structure because I believe you know how to invest your money better than government. We are always looking for ways to strengthen one of the best workforce training programs in the nation. We are a strong manufacturing state, and we have a good research foundation at our universities that companies can lean on.

You’ve proposed phasing out the state’s income tax, tell us about your goals for the state’s tax policy. What do you aim to accomplish by making these changes?

**Reeves:** I firmly believe each individual or CEO, not the government, knows best

“When you look at Mississippi, we’re a state with low real estate and energy costs; we have the infrastructure to get your products to market; we have streamlined regulations and hardworking people. We offer an environment that will help companies meet the needs of their customers and provide opportunities for growth.”

— Governor Tate Reeves
how to invest and spend his or her money. To grow our economy, I believe a flatter, simpler tax policy that lets you keep more of your money is the best way to grow our economy. That’s why I supported phasing out the franchise tax and income tax as lieutenant governor. It’s why I support eliminating the income tax as governor.

What are you doing to foster foreign trade in the state?

Reeves: Mississippi has had tremendous success attracting foreign investment. We’re proud to be the home of Nissan and Toyota. Yokohama Tire and Continental Tire have found success here. I want to build on that good work. I’ve met with representatives from our key international markets. We’re looking to open a European office soon. We simply need to spread the message of the business-friendly climate we have in Mississippi.

Why should any business executive seeking an expansion or relocation in North America consider Mississippi?

Reeves: When you look at Mississippi, we’re a state with low real estate and energy costs, we have the infrastructure to get your products to market, we have streamlined regulations and hardworking people. We offer an environment that will help companies meet the needs of their customers and provide opportunities for growth. We have a proven track record in advanced manufacturing, energy, aerospace and automotive sectors. We want to be a partner that helps you succeed.

MORE THAN 5,000 NEW JOBS CREATED IN 2020

PLUG AND PLAY
OUR SITES ARE READY...ARE YOU?

Three
Ready Industrial Parks • Over 4,500 Developable Acres • Redundant Power • Regional Airport with Global Accessibility

Shovel
• Rail-Served Sites Available • Three Inland Waterway Ports • Interstate Connectivity • Massive Utility Capabilities • Fully Integrated Workforce Pipeline Clay, Lowndes, and Oktibbeha Counties in Mississippi’s Golden Triangle

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MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT GUIDE 13
s the state’s lead economic and community development agency, the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA), found itself charting unfamiliar waters in 2020. In addition to a change in leadership, the organization was tasked with helping local businesses stay afloat during a global pandemic, all while continuing to recruit and retain businesses across the state. Thanks to the solid crew at MDA, the state managed to do all that and more.

We recently spoke with John Rounsaville, who was appointed earlier this year by Governor Tate Reeves to serve as director of the Mississippi Development Authority. In May 2020, Rounsaville began his post on an interim basis. In our interview, Rounsaville shared perspective on the lessons learned over the last year, his goals for the organization and the state’s business ecosystem.

As the new leader of MDA, what are some of your biggest priorities for the year ahead?

John Rounsaville: Like all economic development organizations, our mission is recruiting new companies to Mississippi while also retaining and expanding our existing businesses. Through that mission, we share Governor Reeves’ top priority for the state — increasing household income. We are in consistent communication with executives all over the country — and the world — to show them what Mississippi has to offer, and we will continue to do that through better telling our story. We also want to reinforce community development through expansion of existing businesses. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and as they grow, so do their communities. Another priority is bringing more visitors to the state. Tourism is one of our top economic drivers. With our natural resources, casino resorts, beaches, culture and history, there is much to see and do in Mississippi, no matter what part of the state people visit.

Of course, the pandemic brought challenges for every state across the country. How would you say Mississippi fared as it navigated the hurdles?
Rounsaville: Mississippi fared extremely well in spite of the pandemic and resulting challenges. In fact, we realized a nearly doubling of new capital investment over 2019. Uniquely, while there weren’t many large-scale projects to compete for, 80% of our wins in 2020 were comprised of existing business expansions. That speaks well for us in that our businesses have recognized great success in Mississippi and, therefore, continue to choose to expand and grow here. I think what really made a difference is our state’s pro-business attitude. Governor Tate Reeves, while taking the precautions necessary, kept Mississippi ‘open for business.’ That decision gave our workers and our businesses confidence to push forward and avoid sitting on the sidelines.

What were some of the biggest announcements of 2020 and 2021?

Rounsaville: We had a number of big announcements in 2020 and so far in 2021. Expansions among our defense industry proved vibrant with Navistar Defense in Clay County adding 500 additional jobs and General Atomics in Lee County implementing an expansion that included 125 jobs and a $40 million investment. Along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, we saw a major investment from Calgon Carbon in Hancock County, with a $185 million investment, and Halter Marine in Jackson County invested $10 million in an expansion that created 100 new jobs.

We’re known for our strategic logistics advantages in North Mississippi, and that kept our distribution sector strong. Associated Wholesale Grocers invested $300 million in an expansion in DeSoto County, and Material Bank made a $15 million investment that created 300 new jobs.

Additionally, we saw great success in our forest products industry. Forestry is one of our state’s top agricultural industries, and we’re extremely attractive due to logistics and incredible level of feedstock. Four new sawmill projects announced in 2020 in Mississippi, and this sector has shown no signs of slowing down. Highlights for 2021 include Milwaukee Tool’s major 1,200 job expansion in multiple locations in Mississippi and another sawmill location for Biewer Lumber in Montgomery County with a new $130 million facility.

Tell us about some of the things Mississippi is doing to attract more foreign investment?

Rounsaville: Like our competitors, we’re extremely focused on international investment. We’re expanding our efforts in Europe, specifically, and re-tooling our organization to better meet the needs of our international clients and investors.

We’ve restructured our foreign direct investment and trade group and brought in a new experienced director. Ultimately, we need to do a better job of telling our story and making sure the world knows about Mississippi’s advantages and capabilities — quality of life, workforce, business climate, and transportation and logistics.

Europe has been a great partner for us, and Continental Tire is just one example. The German-based tire production company has a 5 million-square-foot facility just west of Jackson, representing a $1.45 billion investment. The company has hired 500 employees and plans to hire 2,000 more by 2028.

Mississippi’s strategic location makes it a competitive location for global companies. Our excellent transportation network includes six interstate highways and 14 federal highways; 76 airports, including two international airports; dozens of rail systems that serve 2,500 miles of track throughout the state; and 15 ports found along Mississippi’s three navigable waterways. The Mississippi River borders the state to the west, the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway borders the state to the east, and the Gulf of Mexico forms Mississippi’s border to the south. Mississippi boasts two deep-water ports along the Gulf of Mexico, allowing companies convenient, quick access to international markets.
### Top 20 Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Invest. $M</th>
<th>Jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associated Wholesale Grocers, Inc.</td>
<td>Hernando</td>
<td>Transport &amp; Logistics</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Dist./Warehouse</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>79</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steel Dynamics, Inc.</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>Metals</td>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>Calgon Carbon Corporation</td>
<td>Corinth</td>
<td>Wood Products</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>Timberland Inv’t Resources, LLC / Mission Forest Prod.</td>
<td>Corinth</td>
<td>Paper, Print &amp; Packaging</td>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>130</td>
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<td>Kimberly-Clark Corporation</td>
<td>Lumberton</td>
<td>Wood Products</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>Idaho Forest Group LLC</td>
<td>Olive Branch</td>
<td>Mach., Equip. &amp; Const.</td>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ardagh Packaging Holdings Limited</td>
<td>Baldwyn</td>
<td>Chemicals &amp; Plastics</td>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steel Dynamics, Inc.</td>
<td>Byhalia</td>
<td>Paper, Print &amp; Packaging</td>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>300</td>
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<td>Products Forest LLC Vicksburg</td>
<td>Vicksburg</td>
<td>Wood Products</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Parcel Service, Inc.</td>
<td>Ridgeland</td>
<td>Transport &amp; Logistics</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rolls-Royce North America Holdings Inc.</td>
<td>Pascagoula</td>
<td>Mach., Equip. &amp; Const.</td>
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<td>Manufacturing</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>Mississippi Steel Processing, LLC</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>Metals</td>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>Wayne Farms LLC</td>
<td>Laurel</td>
<td>Food &amp; Beverage</td>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
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<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Material Bank</td>
<td>Olive Branch</td>
<td>Consumer Products</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Dist./Warehouse</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>300</td>
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<td>Toshiba America Business Solutions, Inc.</td>
<td>Horn Lake</td>
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<td>New</td>
<td>Dist./Warehouse</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>Ashley Furniture Industries, Inc.</td>
<td>Verona</td>
<td>Consumer Products</td>
<td>Expansion</td>
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<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hankins Lumber Company, Inc.</td>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>Wood Products</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quadient, Inc.</td>
<td>Byhalia</td>
<td>Mach., Equip. &amp; Const.</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Dist./Warehouse</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Projects by Type

- **Manufacturing**: 27 projects
- **Distribution/Warehouse**: 15 projects
- **Headquarters**: 4 projects
- **Research & Development**: 4 projects
- **Office**: 2 projects
- **Data Center**: 1 project

### Projects by Sector

- **Consumer Products**: 7 projects
- **Machinery, Equip. & Const.**: 5 projects
- **Transport & Logistics**: 5 projects
- **Metals**: 5 projects
- **Chemicals & Plastics**: 4 projects
- **Wood Products**: 4 projects
- **Paper, Printing & Packaging**: 4 projects
- **Aerospace**: 3 projects
- **Electronics**: 2 projects
- **Business & Financial Services**: 2 projects
- **Other**: 6 projects

**Source**: Conway Analytics
**Snapshot**

**Jackson**  
Capital

**Tate Reeves (R)**  
Governor

1,267,500  
Labor Force (2019)

2,986,530  
Population (2018)

4  
Foreign Trade Zones

46,923 sq. miles  
Land Area

62 miles  
Coastline

Central  
Time Zone

$114.1 billion  
GDP (2018)

$11.8 billion  
Exports (2019)

**Neighboring States**

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Louisiana
- Tennessee

Subtropical with long summers, short mild winters  
Climate

Canada, Mexico, Panama, China, Japan  
Top Export Markets (2018)

*SOURCE: MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY*
In FY2020, companies invested $1.1 BILLION in Mississippi & created 4,312 JOBS

**Workforce**

#2 COST OF DOING BUSINESS

1 OF 28 RIGHT-TO-WORK STATES

22,133+ WORKERS TRAINED

**Logistics**

ROADS
DIVIDED FOUR-LANE HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE
SIX INTERSTATES & 14 FEDERAL HIGHWAYS

RAIL
30 RAIL CAR PROVIDERS, INCLUDING FIVE CLASS 1 RAILROADS, (2,500 MILES OF TRACK)

PORTS
15 PORTS (2 DEEPWATER), MISSISSIPPI RIVER, & TENNESSEE-TOMBIGBEE WATERWAY

AIR
7 COMMERCIAL AIRPORTS (INCLUDING TWO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS)

**Mississippi’s Top 10 Export Countries and Values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 CANADA</td>
<td>$2,229,741,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 MEXICO</td>
<td>$1,170,298,121</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 PANAMA</td>
<td>$1,034,873,880</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 NETHERLANDS</td>
<td>$637,656,841</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 HONDURAS</td>
<td>$525,192,693</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 CHINA</td>
<td>$512,492,780</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 BELGIUM</td>
<td>$492,288,458</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 GUATEMALA</td>
<td>$482,814,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 JAPAN</td>
<td>$418,592,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 BRAZIL</td>
<td>$376,646,083</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Seven (7) rail connections
- Four (4) Class 1 interchanges (CN, CSX, NS, KCS)
- Three (3) short line connections (ASR, CGR, T ASD)

- Full-service railcar and locomotive repair shop
- Railcentric development sites near a thriving, commerce-rich industrial zone

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What do an armored vehicle and a state university have in common? A lot more than you may think.

In the case of the vehicles being built by CITE Armored in Holly Springs and Batesville, Mississippi, the engineering behind many of the company’s products comes directly from Mississippi State University in Starkville.

That’s because CITE has an innovative partnership with MSU that enables the firm to tap into the talent and expertise of MSU engineering students and graduates and keep a steady pipeline of new employees at the ready.

“We are very thankful for our partnership with Mississippi State,” says Ken Russell, co-founder and senior vice president of operations for CITE. “We hire their engineering graduates, and we are always working
WITH MSU TO MAKE SURE WE GET THE TALENT AND WORK EXPERIENCE WE NEED.”

CITE recently increased its presence in Mississippi by locating van production operations in Batesville. The company is investing $2.3 million and adding 30 new positions as part of this expansion to a new site.

“CITE is excited to be opening our second location in Batesville,” said Teresa Hubbard, owner, co-founder and CEO of CITE. “We feel confident that Batesville will provide a strong strategic advantage in fulfilling our customer needs. Thank you to all those who have made this transition efficient and seamless.”

CITE qualifies for the Advantage Jobs Rebate Program, which provides a rebate to eligible businesses that create new jobs and pay more than the average annual wage for the state and county. The expansion project also received assistance from Panola County, the city of Batesville, the Panola Partnership and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

All around the state, innovative partnerships like this between employers and colleges are facilitating business expansion and job growth.

At The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, there is even a center devoted to facilitating business growth. It is called the Trent Lott National Center for Excellence in Economic Development and Entrepreneurship. The center serves as a catalyst for a university-wide focus on economic development training and research serving public entities, nonprofit organizations, businesses (continued on page 26)
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“To be a great leader means to be an accessible servant of the people.”

To understand what Dr. Felecia M. Nave means by those words, you must know her life story.

Spend just 15 minutes with her, and you’ll learn that a servant’s heart isn’t just something she plays lip service to; it’s her moral compass. In a recent interview, the president of Alcorn State University shared the values, principles and beliefs that form her foundation of leadership and provide the framework for everything that happens at the nation’s oldest historically black land-grant university.

How does Alcorn State University support economic development in Mississippi?

DR. FELECIA M. NAVE: Economic development is a priority for me as the president and this institution. We are in the southwest region of the state — one of the poorest regions in Mississippi. Some of the more economically challenged areas of the state make up the 13-county containment area we serve. On many levels, we serve as the economic heartbeat of this region, not just the economic driver. We are the second largest employer behind Entergy in the two counties we occupy. We commissioned a study by EMSI, and they found that Alcorn State contributes $100 million a year to the regional economy.

As an institution, we must have access to a highly trained workforce. A significant percentage of our employees come directly from this area, so we are invested in the vitality of this region. Our fates are irrevocably tied. Because of who I am as a person, I think we have a moral responsibility to be of service and uplift our students and employees, and that goes beyond the physical boundaries of our 1,700 acres. It affects the social, mental and economic health of this community. We uplift not only this region, but also the state of Mississippi.

What role does Alcorn State University play in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship?

NAVE: We play a major role. We partner and take the lead in our areas of expertise. For example, we are a land grant institution. In agriculture, we offer a lot of assistance to our farmers. With socially disadvantaged farmers, we assist them and support their businesses, improve their crop production, etc. We are completing a new School of Business. It will benefit the broader community.

Agriculture is a hugely important industry in Mississippi. How does your university help that business thrive and grow?
NAVE: In the academic space, we engage in research to meet the challenges we face in food deserts. We design and develop new technologies. We help in farm management and careers. We articulate that agriculture is not the same as it was 50 and 100 years ago. We now have GIS tracking, drone technologies, mapping out lands, etc. We measure water tables and solar tables and modulate what they grow to maximize production.

In our extension services, we are continuously engaged in our communities to educate them on child nutrition, business planning, business management, etc. We use the extension in innovative ways. As we look toward the future of poultry, we make sure we are working with commercial and specialty farmers. Alcorn State is a major player in the innovation and technology taking place in farming.

What impact did the global pandemic have on Alcorn State?

“We commissioned a study by EMSI, and they found that Alcorn State contributes $100 million a year to the regional economy.”

— Dr. Felicia M. Nave, President, Alcorn State University

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and individuals. Among other services, the center provides client-requested assistance and offers expertise in strategic planning and leadership development; education and training; community analysis and research; and other technical support.

The Trent Lott Center also works with various companies and organizations to plan and implement activities designed to generate jobs and income using data-driven economic development.

The Haley Barbour Center for Manufacturing Excellence at the University of Mississippi in Oxford is focused on preparing the next generation of leaders in manufacturing. On the center’s 12,000-sq.-ft. manufacturing floor, students turn their ideas into tangible products, using more than 70 pieces of manufacturing equipment. The average job placement rate for these graduates is 100%.

Hinds Community College, the largest community college in the state, is a major player in workforce development and training. With a main campus in Raymond and branch campuses in Jackson and Vicksburg, HCC boasts an enrollment of over 12,000 students on six campuses.

NAVE: It impacted our enrollment and revenue collection. We had to cancel our football season. Our freshmen enrollment was down. But we did well in student retention. This happened only nine months into my presidency. Very early on in my tenure, I had to make decisions in an environment where there was so much uncertainty and fear. We experienced challenges to our operations. We learned how to pivot. We pushed a message of how to be more flexible and patient. We came back last fall at 80% to where we normally were. We had capacity limits on our facilities. This fall, we will come back at 90 to 95% of normal. We will lift all capacity limits. People are so ready for football and fellowship. They are ready to engage.

What impact did changing the state flag have on your institution?

NAVE: Before I arrived, Mississippi institutions had taken a position that the flag would not fly on our campuses, so we were not flying the state flag here. My role was one of being supportive of the change. The bigger impact was how it made our graduates feel and the emotional impact of it. Plus, it made sense from an economic perspective. Sometimes, people hold onto their traditions and beliefs at the expense of the greater good. It was always obvious to me that the state would do better just by changing the flag. When the change finally did occur, I was excited for the state. It was much needed. We needed to diversify. It enabled the state to set a different image. Mississippi really is a great state.

(continued from page 21)
Ryan Miller hasn’t been on the job for long, but he’s already making a big impact. Newly appointed as Mississippi’s first executive director of the Office of Workforce Development, he is taking center stage as the top state official charged with making sure the state continues to provide a pipeline of talent to Mississippi’s many employers.

As head of the state’s workforce development efforts, Miller takes over a role that became even more challenging in 2020 due to COVID-19 and the corresponding economic recession. At the height of the pandemic, more than 40 million Americans had filed for unemployment. Mississippi reached peak unemployment in April 2020 with a jobless rate of 15.7%. By April 2021, it had plummeted to 6.2%.

“COVID-19 had a major impact on the job market and workforce in Mississippi,” says Miller, who spent 13 years building the Center for Manufacturing Excellence (CME)
“For the first time in state history, this is a coordinated approach to workforce development like we have never seen before.”

— Ryan Miller, Mississippi Office of Workforce Development

and preparing students for careers in advanced industries. “We never really had to deal with these things before. As a state, we are still digging our way out of that time. We are emerging from COVID-19 and trying to assess the environment of people who want to work. Many businesses are screaming for people. We can be a resource to connect unemployed people to those job opportunities.”

The silver lining of the pandemic? “We have some new tools that have emerged from COVID-19,” he says. “How we deploy training tools now is different than before. These tools can be much more accessible now due to the technology that is available. For example, I never saw my students again after spring break in 2020. We went straight to Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and other virtual learning platforms.”

COVID-19 taught the state to be more creative and innovative, says Miller, who graduated from the University of Mississippi in 2002 and later earned a law degree. “We must be willing to try new ideas. For example, what resources are available to help single moms return to the workforce? How do we encourage people to pursue a career path that is much better for them? As a result, the state recognized the need for an office to coordinate workforce development — an office to create new partnerships with industry and recruit and retain talent. We needed to promote a healthy workforce with a strategy that looked at everything from top to bottom, left to right, and
stem to stern.”

Miller notes that Mississippi “has a lot of partners with this office who are doing some great things to make sure that our workers receive the training they need to fill skilled jobs and pursue the most rewarding career paths. Many Mississippians have an unbelievable opportunity to receive incredible wages and establish generational wealth.”

A state of 3 million residents, Mississippi has a workforce of approximately 1.267 million people. A sizable cohort — 136,534 — work for Mississippi’s 2,366 manufacturers.

Miller says the state can convince even more manufacturers to set up shop in the Magnolia State if they would just consider the benefits. Mississippi ranks No. 2 among the lowest cost states for doing business, and it is one of 25 Right-to-Work states.

Miller says the endorsement of his office and its efforts comes straight from the Governor’s Office and Legislature. “Our office has the support, encouragement and direction of the full state leadership,” he notes. “For the first time in state history, this is a coordinated approach to workforce development like we have never seen before. We are working with the Mississippi Development Authority and private industry leaders. You will see Mississippi moving forward and moving forward quickly.”

Even though he was just 5 weeks on the job when we talked, Miller says, “We hit the ground running. This is really an exciting time to be here.”

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How Mississippi Became a LEADER IN R&D

When solid rocket fuel innovator Adranos Inc. announced May 4 that it would expand its rocket motor research and development operations in McHenry, it was but the latest evidence that Mississippi had positioned itself as a national and global leader in R&D.

After announcing last September that it would open a location in McHenry, Adranos revealed in May 2021 that it will invest $1.35 million and create 25 new jobs with this latest expansion. Located at the 640-acre, seven-building complex formerly occupied by General Dynamics, Adranos is testing next-generation rocket fuel. The firm cited the location’s proximity to Stennis Space Center and its compliance with all Department of Defense safety requirements for munitions handling as the primary reasons for selecting the site.

Both the Mississippi Development Authority and the Stone County

by RON STARNER
“For decades, Mississippi has played a critical role in the nation’s space exploration efforts, and innovative companies like Adranos continue to provide lucrative careers in this exciting field to the citizens of our state.”

— Chris Stoker, CEO, Adranos Inc.

Economic Development Partnership are providing financial incentives for the building improvements.

Once the 25 new positions are filled, the company will have 45 workers on site. “We are grateful for the continued support of Stone County and the state of Mississippi as we continue developing our high-performance solid rocket fuel,” said Adranos CEO Chris Stoker. “The McHenry location will provide us access to first-class facilities and an exceptional talent base to enable the growth of our rocket motor research, development and production operations for years to come.”

Gov. Tate Reeves welcomed the announcement by saying, “For decades, Mississippi has played a critical role in the nation’s space exploration efforts, and innovative companies like Adranos continue to provide lucrative careers in this exciting field to the citizens of our state. I am grateful for our partnership with the Adranos team and thank them for growing their workforce so even more Mississippians have the opportunity to be a part of the company’s innovative rocket fuel testing in Stone County.”

UNIVERSITY HUBS BOOST INNOVATION

Adranos is far from alone in using Mississippi as a launchpad for significant R&D investments. Ocean Springs-based Skylar Laboratories made a $200,000 gift to the National Center for Natural Products Research at the University of Mississippi’s School of Pharmacy in September 2019. Half of that funding is going to the discovery of new medicinal properties in plants.

Prior to that, Ole Miss had established a new center to advance translational science and engineering of graphene-based technologies — the Center for Graphene Research and Innovation. And across the state in Starkville, a $3.08 million grant from the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center is advancing critical research at Mississippi State University in remote sensing and high-performance computing.

MSU, by the way, was notified June 4 that it ranked among the nation’s top 100 research universities and No. 1 in the state. Among all institutions in the National Science Foundation’s recently released Higher Education Research and Development Survey, MSU moved up six spots to No. 92 nationally with more than $264.5 million in R&D expenditures for FY2019, an increase of $290 million from 2018. An NSF top 100 research university for nearly two decades, MSU boasts 30 disciplines and subdisciplines ranked in the top 100 in the latest report. MSU also has reported an increase in R&D spending for six straight years, capping off a decade that saw MSU report $2.3 billion in total R&D expenditures from FY2010 to FY2019.

MSU ranks in the top 15 nationally in both agricultural sciences (No. 12) and social sciences (No. 15). MSU has ranked in the top 5% of all universities for agricultural research for roughly 20 years. Also, the eighth year in a row, MSU leads all Southeastern Conference schools in social sciences research funding. MSU ranks first in the state with 4,044 research personnel, including 605 principal investigators.

Over the last 10 years, higher education R&D expenditures in Mississippi have grown from $4.43.6 million in FY2010 to $535.8 million in FY2019. In FY2019, the next largest R&D expenditures came from Ole Miss ($158.8 million) and the University of Southern Mississippi ($76.5 million).
Mississippi’s Northwest region is a powerhouse for the logistics and distribution industry on the Mississippi River. Located within 500 miles of 70% of the nation’s population, Memphis, just north of Mississippi’s northern border, is the distribution capital of the United States. Touching five counties, including DeSoto, Tunica, Tate, Marshall and Benton, the Northwest Mississippi region is home to a skilled workforce serving various industries.

Northwest Mississippi is a central North American access point with multimodal transportation advantages. The
Memphis International Airport, the UPS Hub, 5 class 1 rail providers, and the Port of Memphis are easily accessible, allowing products to get to market quickly.

DeSoto County is home to over 150 fulfillment centers. Companies like Williams-Sonoma, Milwaukee Electric Tool, Synnex, McKesson have operated vital distribution facilities in DeSoto County for years. While tech giants Google and Amazon have recently invested in the region as well. Amazon launched its first facility in Mississippi in Byhalia, Marshall County, in 2019 and a new fulfillment center this August in Olive Branch. Google selected Southaven for its 60,000-sq.-ft. call center, which is expected to open this summer.

In addition to its well-known logistical advantages, the region is attracting investment in sectors ranging from biomedical, e-commerce, food and beverage, material handling automation, primary metals and petrochemical manufacturing. In 2020, according to the DeSoto County Economic Development Council, nine companies expanded their presence in the area creating 2,942 new jobs, representing $590 million in industrial investments.

Communities like Southaven, Hernando, Horn Lake and Olive Branch offer an affordable quality of life and ease of access to the Memphis metro area. Olive Branch earned the No. 35 spot in Money Magazine’s “2020 Best Places to Live in the U.S.”

PHOTO COURTESY MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Drop your finger in the middle of a map of the Southeast U.S., and you’ll point to Jackson, Mississippi. Greater Jackson is squarely located at the center of the southeast within 500 miles of approximately 39% of the country’s population and total personal income. The Greater Jackson MSA is home to 596,290 people and consists of Yazoo, Madison, Hinds, Rankin, Copiah and Simpson counties.

The state’s capital city is located halfway between Dallas and Atlanta, making it a roughly six-hour drive to both major markets. The metro area is also within an approximately three-hour drive from Memphis, Mobile and New Orleans. Logistically, the region is well connected with rail access provided by Kansas City Southern, Interstates 55, 20 and 59, highways 80 and 49, three ports including the Port of Vicksburg, Yazoo County Port and Claiborne County Port and the Jackson-Medger Wiley Evers International Airport.
Major aerospace firms including Eaton, Raytheon and L-3 Communications Vertex Aerospace operate facilities in the area, boasting a large aerospace talent pool of more than 1,000. The industry has room to grow in the city with the Jackson Metro Aeroplex, an 896-acre site adjacent to the Jackson-Medger Wiley Evers International Airport, which offers 458 acres designated for aerospace manufacturing and distribution with more than 200 acres providing access to two large runways.

In addition to aerospace, the region’s most significant industry clusters include freight transportation, retail, manufacturing, food and beverage production and construction. With seven colleges and universities in the metro area, including Hinds Community College, Jackson State University and Mississippi College, there is no shortage of talent. Hinds Community College is the largest in the state and offers various programs aimed at preparing students to work in local industries.

Given the city and region’s key position in the southeast, logistic giants UPS and Amazon have announced new facilities in the area. This summer, construction is expected to begin on a new UPS last-mile distribution center in Madison County. UPS announced in October 2020 it would build a $28.6 million facility in Ridgeland with plans to create 161 new high-paying jobs.

In November, Amazon announced its plans to launch a new state-of-the-art fulfillment center in Madison County as well, creating more than 1,000 new full-time jobs.

“Madison County is elated that Amazon chose our community for its state-of-the-art fulfillment center. Amazon is a globally recognized brand that will further strengthen the business-friendly environment and promote economic diversification,” said Karl Banks, Madison County Supervisor. “Madison County welcomes Amazon as its newest corporate citizen and looks forward to the tremendous economic benefit and employment opportunities it brings.”
Hattiesburg: SOUTHERN HUB OF INDUSTRY

by SAVANNAH KING

C
entrally located among Jackson, Gulfport-Biloxi, New Orleans and Mobile, Hattiesburg's nickname of "Hub City" makes a lot of sense. Couple the city's ideal location with its robust transportation network, and it is even easier to understand why Hattiesburg is the No. 1 city in the state for job growth.

Home to approximately 148,000 people, Hattiesburg offers a lower cost of living and affordable housing, 29% lower than the national average. According to ESRI, Hattiesburg's central location allows companies to draw from a surrounding labor pool of 147,496 within a 45-minute drive and 210,090 within an hour drive of the city. Compared to other major cities in the south, Hattiesburg has one of the highest percentages of millennials.

With four colleges and universities, including the University of Southern Mississippi, William Carey University, Pearl River Community College, and Jones County Junior College, over 26,000 college students are within a 30-mile radius. According to the Area Development Partnership of Greater Hattiesburg, 88.85% of the greater metro area's population (25 or older) hold at least a high school diploma. Nearly 30% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Workforce
training programs like the Pine Belt Works Basic Manufacturing Certificate Program provide local industries and students opportunities. Additionally, the University of Southern Mississippi’s Polymer Science Engineering program and the Polymer Institute offer world-class polymer research and workforce training.

Hattiesburg’s primary industries are centered around transportation, health care and education, military, hospitality, manufacturing and professional services. In recent years, the region has become a hub for green energy, with 150 MW on the grid from solar power.

Kohler Power, a manufacturer of engines, generators and uninterruptible power supplies, is expanding its operation in Hattiesburg. The company has been manufacturing its products in the city since 1998. The new manufacturing line will encompass approximately 80,000 square feet of one of Kohler’s Hattiesburg facilities. Kohler will be expanding into an additional 187,000 square-foot space to increase its engine warehousing operations in the third quarter of this year, bringing the company’s manufacturing and warehousing space in Hattiesburg to more than 900,000 square feet.

In March 2019, Kohler announced it was consolidating engine manufacturing operations from Wisconsin to Hattiesburg, creating 250 new full-time jobs in addition to the 350 workers already employed there. Kohler Power plans to fill the 75 new generator-manufacturing jobs later this year. The addition of the new jobs will bring the company’s total employment in Hattiesburg to approximately 800.

“Kohler is one of America’s oldest and largest privately held companies. Originally recruited to Hattiesburg more than 20 years ago, it is now Hattiesburg’s second-largest manufacturing employer,” said Hattiesburg Mayor Toby Barker. “Kohler’s latest expansion announcement with 75 new jobs proves that it believes the Hattiesburg community plays a critical role in its long-term success. Additionally, this announcement continues to grow the advanced manufacturing sector in our local economy. Thanks to our partners at The Area Development Partnership for their leadership and foresight to help make this expansion a possibility.”
The Gulfport-Biloxi-Pascagoula MSA, located along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, is home to nearly 400,000 people and a highly supportive business climate. Encompassing three counties — Hancock, Harrison and Jackson — this region offers easy access to the Gulf of Mexico and is a hub for shipbuilding, aerospace and defense, advanced manufacturing and petrochemicals.

Not only is the coastal region beautiful to visit, but it's also

Gulfport-Biloxi-Pascagoula: Built to Move

AEROSPACE AND SHIPBUILDING LEAD IN COASTAL MISSISSIPPI.

by SAVANNAH KING
a strategic position in the southeast. In addition to its large military presence, including Keesler Air Force Base and the Naval Construction Battalion Center, the region is home to NASA's John C. Stennis Space Center, the largest rocket engine test complex in North America. Coastal Mississippi is well suited for continued growth in the aerospace sector with three aerospace parks along Interstate 10, the fastest-growing aerospace corridor in the U.S.

The region is home to a large and growing list of UAS companies thanks to its unlimited air and water space and supporting industry. Additionally, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College and Pearl River Community College offer UAS research, testing, and development curriculum.

With access to three ports, major shipbuilding operations established in the region include Huntington Ingalls Industries, U.S. Marine Inc., Halter Marine Inc., Gulf Coast Shipyard Group, Signet Maritime and Rolls Royce. Huntington-Ingalls, which has produced warships for the U.S. Navy and other governments since the 1930s, is the state's largest private employer.

In 2020, two shipbuilders announced plans to expand in the region and create hundreds of jobs. Gulf Ship, a specialty shipbuilding operation, is growing in Gulfport, where it will fulfill a new contract for tugboats and create more than 200 jobs. ST Engineering Halter Marine and Offshore Inc. is expanding in Pascagoula, where it will create 100 jobs.

The coastal region is also a powerhouse for energy and specialty chemical production. Mississippi’s energy assets include 12 major natural gas pipelines statewide, Chevron’s largest domestic refinery, and several other smaller oil and natural gas refineries. Several pipelines extend through the area, supporting a range of industries.
Powering Up to Meet Demand in 82 Counties

3 LARGE ELECTRIC UTILITY COMPANIES CATER TO THE NEEDS OF GROWING BUSINESSES.

by RON STARNER

With Cooperative Energy, Entergy Mississippi and Mississippi Power, customers in the Magnolia State will find that their energy needs are met with superior service and at some of the most competitive rates in the country.

Mitch Stringer, director of economic development for Cooperative Energy, says that his organization’s 11 member-owned distribution electric cooperatives provide electric power to roughly 432,000 customers in 55 of Mississippi’s 82 counties. Stretching from Lyon and Greenwood in the north to Lucedale and Kiln in the south, the service territory of Cooperative Energy covers the length of the state and meets the needs of both residential and industrial end-users.

“We touch just about every county west of Interstate 55 and just about every county south of Interstate 20,” says Stringer. “We are based in Hattiesburg, but we are very experienced in serving the needs of all of our customers in a wide variety of industries across the state.”

While the global pandemic slowed business growth considerably in the second and third quarters of 2020, the pace of corporate expansion accelerated quickly in the fourth quarter of 2020 and has continued well into 2021, Stringer notes.

“Business expansion activity has picked up a lot lately. The fourth quarter of last year was when we started to see the pickup emerge. Then, by the first quarter of 2021, that’s when it really picked up, and it has increased even more in the second quarter.”

COVID-19 may have dimmed
business growth prospects for a while, but it did not deter a number of sizable investments in the service territory of Cooperative Energy last year. Among the more notable projects were Rolls-Royce investing $22 million and adding 24 jobs in Pascagoula; RespirTek investing $1.5 million and hiring 25 people in Jackson County; Cutting Edge Meat Co. committing $1.35 million to expand in Leaksville and add 14 jobs; and Adranos Inc. spending $525,000 to grow its rocket fuel testing business in Stone County, a deal that added 20 positions.

Stringer says to expect more sawmill project announcements in the second half of 2021 as well. “In Mississippi last year, there were four major sawmill announcements,” he says. “If the demand for wood products keeps up over the next six months, we will have another four
announcements around the state just in our territory.

Cooperative Energy’s sales pitch to industrial prospects is simple, says Stringer. “We offer low costs, and abundance of available assets, particularly for end-users in the timber and wood products sectors, and we offer power that is readily available and affordable across our 55-county territory. Plus, people are available, qualified and ready to go to work; and they are becoming more and more skilled all the time, thanks to our network of six community colleges.”

**ENTERGY MISSISSIPPI**

Entergy Mississippi, based in Jackson, serves about 456,000 customers in 45 of Mississippi’s 82 counties. Entergy companies employ approximately 2,500 people in the state, and the service territory ranges from Adams and Amite counties to Yalobusha and Yazoo counties and a host of places in between. Entergy serves some of the biggest and most power-hungry industries in the country. To ensure that these heavy industry customers have access to reliable and affordable energy, Entergy established a Business Development Team to provide comprehensive assistance to support the needs of businesses across the entire four-state Entergy region of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

From site selection to energy planning and technical engineering and financing, Entergy has people available to help expanding businesses at every step along the way. Entergy’s dedicated Project and Technical Services Group will “work with you from the moment you begin thinking of opening a new location or expanding your business,” the company notes on its website.

Among the many services provided by Entergy to facilitate economic development are a comprehensive database of buildings and sites, GIS analysis, site evaluation, property and community marketing videos, and the ability to develop prompt, innovative and cost-effective solutions to address power quality sensitivities for large industrial customers.

**MISSISSIPPI POWER**

Mississippi Power, headquartered in Gulfport, has been around for nearly a full century and produces energy for more than 188,000 customers in 23 southeast Mississippi counties. These range from Leake and Neshoba counties on the northern end of the territory to Hancock, Harrison and Jackson on the Gulf Coast.

With nearly 160 megawatts of approved solar energy capacity, Mississippi Power is the largest partner in providing renewable energy in the state. The company also recently received the Community Partner Impact Award from the Center for Energy Workforce Development for its innovative and ongoing efforts to build a diverse workforce.

The sales pitch from Mississippi Power to industrial customers is straightforward. “The region offers a highly motivated and productive workforce that is supported by a network of community colleges capable of customizing workforce training programs for new and expanding industry,” the company notes on its website. “Southeast Mississippi is strategically located in one of the fastest growing regions of the U.S. and offers operating costs below the national average.”

A large inventory of available sites and buildings, including sites certified through Mississippi Power’s Project Ready program, makes finding the optimum site for business a lot quicker and easier; and Mississippi Power stands ready to help prospects qualify for a host of competitive incentives.
At Cooperative Energy, Mississippi’s only generation and transmission cooperative, we are committed to Economic Development as one important way of improving the communities we serve in our state. Our team is dedicated to growing the economy by attracting new investment, supporting our existing companies and advocating job growth. To learn more, visit us at CooperativeEnergy.com.

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HOW MISSISSIPPI PORTS CATER TO MANUFACTURERS, SHIPPERS AND CONSUMERS.

With access to 15 ports providing direct passage to the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River and other inland waterways, Mississippi stands apart as a destination of choice for logistics end-users along the Gulf Coast of the U.S.

From the Port of Gulfport and the Port of Pascagoula on the Gulf Coast to Yellow Creek in Iuka in the northeastern corner of the state, Mississippi offers a little bit of everything for manufacturers and shippers needing access to markets throughout the Americas.

Five ports on the Mississippi River provide a direct connection to places in Canada, Mexico and everywhere in between. An unparalleled water transportation network like that is a big reason why Mississippi landed so many shipping-driven projects in 2020. For example, inland water transportation firm Golding Barge Line grew its operations in Vicksburg with a $20 million investment that created 25 new jobs. In Pascagoula, ship maintenance and repair company ST Engineering Halter Marin and Offshore Inc. committed to invest $10 million into a corporate expansion and add 100 new workers.

The thousands of miles of shipping lanes in and around Mississippi are a big reason why the state accounts for an abundance of foreign trade. Every year, Mississippi companies export more than $2.2 billion worth of goods to Canada, the state’s No. 1 trade partner. Mexico ranks second...
with $1.7 billion, while Panama ranks third with $1.03 billion. The remaining top 10 trade partners for exports are the Netherlands, Honduras, China, Belgium, Guatemala, Japan and Brazil.

Pivotal to this trade success are Mississippi’s two major ports on the Gulf Coast: the Port of Gulfport and the Port of Pascagoula.

The Port of Gulfport is a deep-water, international seaport handling around 329 deep-draft vessels annually. A key gateway to Central America, the port is the second largest green fruit import facility in the U.S. In the last five years the port has signed several new leases with maritime tenants and existing tenants, including Chemours, Dole, Island View Casino Resort and Crowley. It’s also the home port for the University of Southern Mississippi’s research vessel.

The Port of Pascagoula is administered by the Jackson County Port Authority and is located on the southeastern coast of the state as a full-service deep-water port with modern facilities for handling cargo from around the globe. The port’s two harbors include a combination of public and private terminals that can handle more than 32 million tons of cargo through the ship channel each year. The Port of Pascagoula is the largest seaport in Mississippi and ranks among the top 20 ports nationally in total foreign cargo volume.

This port’s primary assets include 42-feet-deep channels, just 2 hours pilotage to shipping lanes, weather-protected rail operations, extremely competitive rates and a flexible labor force.

One of the most strategic inland ports in the state is the Port of Vicksburg, which handles 14 million tons of freight annually and offers the only rail crossing of the Mississippi River in the state. It is also designated as a Foreign Trade Zone and Port of Entry and maintains a U.S. Customs Service operation.

Within the state are four other ports along the 2,350-mile-long river: Rosedale, Greenville, Gibson and Natchez.
With utilities, developers, investors, customers and state officials in Jackson all plugged in, Mississippi is in the midst of a solar energy surge. Mississippi Power, the state’s largest utility, has four solar projects in the works and touts the clean and renewable energy source as a stable and cost-effective generator of electricity.

“As Mississippi’s largest partner in renewable energy,” the company said in statement, “we’re proud to support the state’s economy and solar growth.”

In the spring of 2021 alone, new solar projects that either broke ground or were announced in Mississippi promise to more than double the state’s production of solar electricity.

On April 22, Canadian Solar announced that its subsidiary, Recurrent Energy, had broken ground on the 100 MW Sunflower Solar Project on 1,000 acres in Sunflower County in the Mississippi Delta.

Sunflower is one of the first utility-scale solar projects to be constructed under a Build Transfer Agreement in the U.S.. Ownership of the plant will transfer to Entergy Mississippi when it reaches commercial
The Sunflower project is expected to employ approximately 400 workers at peak construction, with 75% of those construction jobs expected to be filled by local skilled tradespeople from the area. Once operational, the project will power more than 16,000 homes with low-cost, clean electricity, equivalent to displacing approximately 170,000 metric tons of CO2 per year or taking about 37,000 passenger vehicles off the road.

**RECORD-BREAKING STREAK**

When Recurrent broke ground, its Sunflower solar project could have been counted as Mississippi’s biggest. But that held for less than a week because, in a fitting sign of solar power’s rapid growth, a project twice the size was announced just five days later when the Tennessee Valley Authority tapped Origis Energy to develop a 200 MW solar farm in Clay County, in Mississippi’s Golden Triangle. Origis will develop, build, own and operate the plant, which is to include 50 MW of battery storage.

“The Sunflower Solar project is another important milestone in Entergy Corporation’s continued transformation of its power generation portfolio, meeting customers’ needs with clean, efficient sources of electricity while maintaining some of the lowest retail rates in the country,” said Haley Fisackerly, Entergy Mississippi president and CEO.

“Entergy’s investments in its generation portfolio transformation have resulted in substantial reductions in the company’s greenhouse gas emissions and provided significant savings to customers from lower fuel costs,” Fisackerly said. “Along with being able to offer renewable energy to our customers once this project is complete, we’re pleased with the positive economic impact it will have on Sunflower County and the Mississippi Delta.”

**T**he Mississippi Clean Energy Initiative Incentives Program provides tax incentives to companies that manufacture systems or components used to generate clean, renewable or alternative energy, which includes nuclear, solar and wind power and hydrogenation. The program provides qualifying companies with a 10-year exemption from state income and franchise taxes, as well as a sales and use tax exemption to establish a plant or expand an existing production facility.

To qualify, businesses must commit to invest a minimum of $50 million and create 250 full-time jobs. Eligible businesses must be certified by the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) to take advantage of these incentives.

“The Clay County installation is one of three being built in the Golden Triangle by Florida-based Origis under contract with TVA. The three projects, representing a total capital investment of $500 million, are to generate a combined 550 megawatts of energy along with another 300 megawatts in battery storage.

A 150-MW facility in the Triangle’s Lowndes County is to provide power to two Facebook data centers in the Southeast, a potent demonstration of solar power driving economic development. The Lowndes County solar plant is to include 50 MW of battery storage.

“This solar farm will be Facebook’s first renewable energy project in Mississippi and first large-scale energy storage project, which marks an important milestone for our global portfolio,” said Urvi Parekh, head of renewable energy at Facebook.
IT’S A BLAST

MISSISSIPPI’S AEROSPACE INDUSTRY GOES FULL THROTTLE.

by GARY DAUGHTERS

Aerojet Rocketdyne’s RS-25 engine for NASA is being tested at the Stennis Space Center near Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

SOURCE: NASA

It didn’t take long for solid rocket fuel innovator Adranos, Inc. to determine that it liked Mississippi. Developer of a high-performance propellant for long-range missile and space launch systems, the Indiana-based company planted its flag in Stone County, not far north of Mississippi’s Gulf Coast, in September 2020. Adranos took over a 640-acre, seven-building complex one filled by General Dynamics.

A mere eight months later, Adranos more than doubled its investment with a $1.35 million expansion that’s creating 25 new jobs.

“The opportunity afforded us by Stone County and the Mississippi Development Authority is truly extraordinary,” said Adranos CEO Chris Stoker. “The facility and local employment base will enable us to advance our high-performance rocket fuel and grow our company.
“The facility and local employment base will enable us to advance our high-performance rocket fuel and grow our company for many years to come.”

— Adranos CEO Chris Stoker

The INFINITY Science Center is a non-profit museum that hosts the NASA visitor center at the Stennis facility in Hancock County. The themes of the center’s interactive exhibits include Mississippi Natural History, NASA, space, planets, stars, weather, Earth science, space travel and exploration. Displays include the Apollo 4 command module, a full-sized International Space Station module and a cutaway model of the Orion spacecraft.

A STATE THAT’S AEROSPACE FRIENDLY

Mississippi offers aerospace specific incentives. These include the Aerospace Initiative Incentive Program that provides aerospace companies a 10-year state income tax exemption, a 10-year franchise tax exemption and an exemption from sales and use taxes for facility startup. The Advantage Jobs Program offers a rebate.
of a percentage of Mississippi payroll tax to qualified aerospace manufacturers for up to 10 years, as well. For its expansion in Iuka, Northrop Grumman received a $600,000 grant from the Mississippi Development Authority to construct a warehouse and make additional infrastructure improvements.

Northrop Grumman isn’t the only aerospace company to take advantage of Mississippi’s industry-specific incentives, low operating costs and proximity to global markets via several commercial airports and deep-water ports on the Gulf of Mexico. Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Rolls-Royce, Eaton, Airbus Helicopters and Aerojet Rocketdyne are among the state’s growing cluster of aerospace companies.

Some cluster in the southern part of the state, near the Stennis Space Center. Some are in central Mississippi, including L-3 Communications, Vertex Aerospace in Madison, Raytheon in Forest and Eaton Aerospace in Jackson.

In northern Mississippi, Columbus is home to Aurora Flight Sciences and Airbus Helicopters and Shannan is home to General Dynamics. Mississippi State University in Starkville is home to the FAA Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) Center of Excellence.

The Alliance for System Safety of UAS through Research Excellence, or ASSURE, leads Mississippi State’s Center of Excellence for UAS, so designated by the FAA. The ASSURE team is comprised of top UAS universities and more than 100 government and industry partners.
As a seven-term United States senator with nearly 50 years in public service, William “Thad” Cochran was a fixture in Mississippi politics. A former ensign in the Navy, Cochran first was elected to congress in 1972 and served until the year before his death in 2019.

So, it’s fitting that the Navy’s latest guided-missile destroyer, the USS Thad Cochran, is to be built in Cochran’s home state, in honor of a leader who lent steadfast support to shipbuilding programs for the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard.

The USS Cochran, an Arleigh Burke DDG-51 class warship, is being built under a $936 million Navy contract announced in 2020 by Huntington Ingalls, Inc. Located on 800 acres in Pascagoula, Huntington Ingalls has been building guided-missile destroyers since 1990 and has delivered 32 to the Pentagon, the most recent of which was commissioned in September 2020. The Burke-class ships are the backbone of the Navy, designed to fire Tomahawk missiles and engage in anti-aircraft and antisubmarine warfare.

For its part, Ingalls is the largest supplier of U.S. Navy surface combatants and has built nearly 70% of the U.S. Navy fleet of warships. Employing 11,500 workers, Ingalls is the largest manufacturing employer in Mississippi and a major contributor to the economic growth of Mississippi and Alabama. Ingalls and Mississippi have a relationship that goes back more than 100 years.

“If you’re looking for a workforce that is ready and available and a community that reaches around the workforce to help enable them and train them, and if you’re looking for a state that will partner with businesses to be all you can be, Mississippi’s the state to come to,” said Brian Cuccias, then Ingalls president, before his retirement in the spring of 2021. His replacement, Kari Wilkinson, is the first woman to lead the company.
Shipbuilding is one of Mississippi’s most important industries. More than 33 shipbuilding-related manufacturers employ more than 23,450 skilled workers.

In 2019, Halter Marine won a $746 million Navy contract to build three heavy polar icebreaker cutters for the Coast Guard. In 2020, sister company ST Engineering Halter Marine and Offshore (STEHMO), announced a $10 million expansion of a Pascagoula facility that’s to create 100 new jobs, more than doubling that single facility’s workforce. The expansion, the company said, will allow it to perform new commercial repair work for larger ships and oil platforms, and include machinery and building upgrades.

To help facilitate the expansion, the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) is providing assistance to offset the cost of dredging and approved the company for the Advantage Jobs Rebate program, which provides a rebate to eligible businesses that create new jobs that exceed the average annual wage of the state or the county in which the company locates or expands.

“It has been a pleasure working with MDA and all the stakeholders on the plan to upgrade STEHMO’s facility,” said STEHMO President Nian Hua Lim. “With these developments, STEHMO will be in an excellent position to grow the marine and offshore business and create more employment opportunities for the Gulf Coast community.”

INVESTMENTS KEEP COMING

In addition to financial incentives and a strong workforce, Mississippi’s Gulf Coast location is a key component of its shipbuilding industry. The state offers shipbuilders access to more than 15 ports located along the Gulf, the Mississippi River and the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. The ports of Pascagoula and Gulfport provide deep water access to global commerce.

Other leading shipbuilders operating in Mississippi include U.S. Marine Inc., Trinity Yachts, Gulf Ship, Signet Maritime, New South Marine Builders, Signal International and Rolls-Royce.

Gulf Ship, in September 2020, announced a $7 million expansion that’s to create 200 jobs and facilitate a new contract for world-class tugboats. The specialty shipbuilder and supply company was founded in Gulfport in 2006 and uses its 38-acre shipyard there for the construction and upkeep of tractor tugboats and platform supply vessels. MDA is providing grant funding of up to $900,000 for improvements to the facility.

Also in 2020, Rolls-Royce announced plans to expand its facility in Pascagoula, where it manufactures ship propellers for the Navy. The Defense Department is providing $22 million toward the project as part of its COVID-19 response.

“These investments,” DOD said in a statement, “will have long-term benefits for the U.S. Navy and the Gulf Coast region.”

Rolls-Royce is installing new machine tools to support production of propellers across all of the Navy’s shipbuilding programs. Its Pascagoula facility is only one of two facilities that manufactures propellers for the Navy.
Ingalls Shipbuilding, located in Pascagoula Mississippi, employs over 11,000 shipbuilders and has suppliers across 48 states. With over $14 million in weekly payroll, and a $1.7 billion annual economic impact, Ingalls is shaping the future of Mississippi.

Ingalls Shipbuilding is a division of Huntington Ingalls Industries
Large truck and bus tires began making their way from Continental Tires’s recently opened greenfield plant in Clinton, Mississippi, in October 2020 to customers throughout North America. The plant will produce around 750,000 tires annually. About 500 work at the facility currently, but the $1.4 billion project, when fully built out, will employ 2,500 in the next decade. They will join the tens of thousands of workers already employed in the automotive sector in Mississippi, including 5,000 at Nissan’s plant in Canton, where its Altima, Frontier, Titan and other models are built, and more than 2,000 at Toyota Motor Manufacturing Mississippi’s Blue Springs plant, where the Corolla model is produced.

Nearly 200 automotive suppliers in Mississippi employ about 26,000. Besides supplying Nissan, Toyota and engine maker PACCAR in Columbus, these suppliers work with dozens of out-of-state OEMS, including GM, Nissan and Volkswagen in Tennessee; Mercedes-Benz, Honda and Hyundai in Alabama; Kia in Georgia; and Toyota and GM in Texas.

Suppliers and OEMs benefit from such infrastructure assets as six Interstate highways, two deep water ports in the Gulf of Mexico, two international airports, and the Mississippi River and Tennessee River and Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, among others. Mississippi is home to 30 railcar providers and five Class 1 railroads.

Mississippi State University is home to the Center for Advanced Vehicular Systems (CAVS) and the CAVS-Extension facility in Canton. CAVS is a technology development center for engineering, research and development and technology transfer teams, working closely with Toyota, Nissan and their supply chains.

ENGINE PLANT MARKS 10 YEARS OF MANUFACTURING

In December 2020, PACCAR celebrated its 10th year of manufacturing in Columbus. “Our excellent employees and the plant’s
advanced manufacturing capabilities have created a great environment for building the industry’s best engines, noted Preston Feight, PACCAR chief executive officer."

Planning for the engine plant started in 2006 when an international PACCAR team of managers and engineers from Kenworth, Peterbilt and DAF were tasked with laying the groundwork for a state-of-the-art factory. PACCAR chose Columbus due to its proximity to important transportation logistics networks, talented people and the ability to partner with nearby educational institutions that complement the workforce.

A groundbreaking ceremony in 2007 marked the start of construction for the $400 million facility. The innovative factory design and industry-leading operations have resulted in many honors for manufacturing excellence and environmental impact over the last decade, such as zero-waste-to-landfill, and ISO 14000 environmental management and ISO 9001-TS quality management certifications. Additional investments in factory enhancements and production capacity have positioned the plant to meet engine demand over the next decade. The Columbus factory has produced more than 250,000 PACCAR MX-11 and MX-13 engines to date.

PACCAR established close ties with colleges in the area, including Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women and East Mississippi Community College to help develop a strong local pool of highly skilled employees. These relationships continue to flourish and provide mutual benefit. Not only does the PACCAR engine factory hire or offer internships to associates from surrounding colleges, but employees can also earn valuable training certifications and degrees to enhance their knowledge and skillsets.

“The level of commitment PACCAR engine factory employees have toward their work and their community is something that really resonates within the Peterbilt family and our customers. We would like to congratulate everyone at the Columbus engine factory for a decade of delivering high-quality PACCAR MX engines that benefit our customers in many ways,” said Jason Skoog, Peterbilt general manager and PACCAR vice president.

ARMORED VEHICLES, TOO

In August 2020, Armored vehicle manufacturing company CITE Armored announced plans to increase its presence in Mississippi by locating van production operations in Batesville. The $2.3 million investment will create 30 jobs. CITE Armored, a woman-owned company currently located in Holly Springs, manufactures and services armored cars, SWAT vehicles and supply vehicles for organizations throughout the U.S. and worldwide, including the U.S. Embassy in Haiti, the Iraq Ministry of Trade and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

The company is expanding to accommodate additional military contracts and is moving its armored van production to the former Serta building in Batesville while maintaining the production of its other armored vehicles in Holly Springs. “CITE is excited to be opening our second location in Batesville. We feel confident that Batesville will provide a strong strategic advantage in fulfilling our customer needs,” said CEO Teresa Hubbard.

CITE Armored qualifies for the Advantage Jobs Rebate Program, which provides a rebate to eligible businesses that create new jobs that exceed the average annual wage of the state or county in which the company locates or expands. Panola County, the city of Batesville, the Panola Partnership and TVA also are assisting with the project.

“From the very first meeting it was apparent that CITE Armored was looking for a community that could supply a consistent skilled workforce,” said Panola Partnership CEO Joe Azar. “The combination of the Concourse skills training center, the PreK-12 Spark program and our strong ACT WorkReady Community numbers put our location on top.”

Nearly 200 automotive suppliers in Mississippi employ about 26,000.
STATEWIDE OPTIONS AWAIT DISTRIBUTION CENTER INVESTORS

by MARK AREND
Proximity to the giant FedEx air cargo facility in Memphis, Tennessee, makes northern Mississippi a winning location for warehouse and distribution facilities. But locations throughout the state are served by assets that cater to the logistics requirements of all industries. These include six Interstate highways, 15 ports and two deep-water ports, 30 railcar providers, two international airports and four Foreign Trade Zones. Truckers can access locations that are home to 100 million people in one day’s drive.

Leisure Pools, one of the world’s largest composite fiberglass swimming pool, spa and tanning ledge manufacturers, has finalized plans to establish manufacturing and distribution operations in Picayune, in south Mississippi. The $3.25 million project will create 100 jobs. The company purchased an 83,200-square-foot facility in the Picayune Industrial Park. The new Picayune operations will enable the company to expand its presence in the Gulf States so it can better serve its growing independent dealer network.

The Mississippi Development Authority qualified Leisure Pools for the Advantage Jobs Rebate Program, which is for eligible businesses that create new jobs exceeding the average annual wage of the state or county in which the company locates or expands. Pearl River County and Mississippi Power also are assisting with the project.
MISSISSIPPI STATEWIDE FREIGHT PLAN

LEGEND

- TIER I HIGHWAY
- RAILWAY
- TIER I WATER
- TIER II HIGHWAY
- TIER II WATER
- AIRPORT
- PORT

SOURCE: ESRI, MDOT.
FRENCH IT COMPANY PICKS MARSHALL COUNTY

Communications software and technology company Quadient is locating its North American distribution operations in Marshall County, in northern Mississippi. The project represents an $11 million investment, combining land, facilities, construction and corporate efforts. Quadient will create 75 jobs for its facility. Headquartered in France, Quadient provides technologies for processing and digitizing customer communications, mail, packages, business processes and customer experience management to businesses around the world. The Marshall County facility is in the Gateway Global Logistics Center, which is part of the Chickasaw Trails Industrial Park.

“We are excited to be opening our North American distribution operation in Marshall County and look forward to developing strong relationships with the surrounding communities,” said Doug Ward, vice president and general manager of Supply Chain Operations at Quadient. “The new distribution facility will help support the expansion of Quadient parcel lockers and our mission of helping businesses build powerful, meaningful connections with their customers.”

In central Mississippi, Amazon will launch a new, state-of-the-art fulfillment center in Madison County, creating more than 1,000 new, full-time jobs. It will be the first facility in the state to feature Amazon’s innovative robotics technology. The fulfillment center, which will be located at the Madison County Mega Site, will be Amazon’s fourth Mississippi fulfillment center. The facility will be at least four stories and will house most of the sortable goods sold by Amazon. Associates will pick, pack and ship customers’ orders alongside robots, allowing for a more efficient process that will enable Amazon to meet consumer demand more efficiently.

“Mississippi is a great state for business and gives us the opportunity to better serve our customers in the region,” said Alicia Boler Davis, Amazon’s vice president of global customer fulfillment. “We are excited for our future in the magnolia state and for what this means for our customers as we continue to grow. We’d also like to thank local and state leaders for their strong support in making this project possible.”

COME GROW WITH US

Located in a fast-growing and dynamic industrial region, the Madison County Mega Site offers advanced, on-site infrastructure and access to a skilled and experienced workforce — all within a major Southern metro.

- 875 publicly-owned acres
- 300 MW triple redundancy power
- All utilities on site
- Industrial Spec Building Coming Q4 2021
- 100,000 sf expandable to 300,000 sf
- Concrete tilt-up construction
- 32’ Ceiling
Mississippi punches well above its weight in its ability to deliver skilled workers to the many advanced manufacturers doing business in the state. Companies in the shipbuilding, aerospace, automotive and other sectors take advantage of not just an advanced transportation infrastructure and central location, but a network of local education and training resources that supply advanced manufacturers with talent.

“We are fortunate, as a small state composed of many local ecosystems, to have the layered educational and training pathways that start in the K-12 system and go through our many colleges and universities to address our employers’ needs on a local and regional level,” says Garrett McInnis, executive vice president of The Skills Foundation of Mississippi, a non-profit working with private industry, local communities and state entities to grow the pipeline of skilled workers.

“Mississippi is fortunate to have many examples of local ecosystems that have proven the ability to meet aggressive workforce training needs for manufacturers,” says McInnis. “Whether it be the partnership with Toyota and Itawamba Community College in Blue Springs, Huntington Ingalls and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, or Yokohama Tire and East Mississippi Community College in the Golden Triangle, Mississippi communities large and small have proven their desire and commitment to meeting the needs of industry looking to locate in the Magnolia State.”

McInnis says the Skills Foundation works with employers whose requirements include “engineers of all stripes, those trained in...”
industrial maintenance technology, automation & controls, precision manufacturing, logistics technology and a host of other skills to run and maintain highly advanced automated systems."

How does the Skills Foundation support these companies?

“If a young person doesn’t know about a career, they are certainly not going to pursue it,” McInnis points out. “That’s where we come in. We tell people, especially young people, about the fantastic local careers in manufacturing, and we help them find the best skills-training programs to pursue those careers. The Skills Foundation serves as a private non-profit, educating the public about the best training opportunities that lead to high-quality manufacturing careers through education and outreach initiatives.”

EXPANSIONS UNDERSCORE TALENT AVAILABILITY

In April, Milwaukee Tool, a leading manufacturer of heavy-duty power tools, hand tools, storage and accessories for the professional construction trades, announced plans to expand its presence in Mississippi. The company will invest $60 million in advanced technology and manufacturing equipment to support the operation of a new, 500,000-sq.-ft. accessories manufacturing facility in Grenada County. As part of the 1,200 overall jobs Milwaukee will bring to the region, 800 of these jobs will be in the new Grenada facility, and the remaining 400 will be across its existing Mississippi locations. The Brookfield, Wisconsin-based company has manufacturing, distribution and operations presences in Greenwood, Jackson and Olive Branch, and the company has grown its employee headcount in the state from 526 in 2010 to more than 2,343 in 2020.

“Our people and our culture have clearly made the difference in our growth and success, noted Milwaukee Tool Group President Steve Richman. “As we seek out new opportunities to attract, retain, and recruit the best talent in the country, the state of Mississippi has continued to be a valued partner. We look forward to bringing more jobs to this state.”

In June 2020, Calgon Carbon, a manufacturer of activated carbon products, announced plans to increase production capacity at Port Bienville in Hancock County. The project represents a corporate investment of $185 million and 38 new jobs. The company is adding a new production line at its Bay St. Louis facility and increasing production space from 200,000 square feet to 400,000 square feet. The expansion also will increase Calgon Carbon’s total annual production capacity to more than 200 million pounds of granular activated carbon.

“This expansion enables our activated carbon products to be more broadly used to clean the world’s air and water on an even larger scale,” said Steve Schott, Calgon Carbon president and CEO. “There is no better place for this expansion, we have always felt at home in Mississippi, and we appreciate the support and enthusiasm the state and local economic development leadership have shown us, and our parent company, Kuraray.”

Manufacturing thrives when communities embrace the companies and encourage their people to pursue opportunities in manufacturing, notes The Skills Foundation’s McInnis. “Mississippi manufacturers have found repeatedly that Mississippi communities don’t take them for granted, and Mississippi workers appreciate the high-paying opportunities those manufacturers provide. This symbiotic relationship between Mississippi manufacturers and the communities where they thrive is good for all involved and ensures future growth potential across the state.”

“Mississippi is fortunate to have many examples of local ecosystems that have proven the ability to meet aggressive workforce training needs for manufacturers.”

— Garrett McInnis, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE SKILLS FOUNDATION OF MISSISSIPPI

Facing Page: A worker at Milwaukee Tools
PHOTO COURTESY MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
TIME TO FLEX:
MISSISSIPPI PLASTICS KNOWLEDGE AND
INNOVATION COVER THE SPECTRUM

by ADAM BRUNS

Plastics and plastics-dependent companies combine to employ 380,000 people in Mississippi. Behind every one of those companies is a story of innovation that’s led to growth in the state.

Take Bill Seemann, founder of Seemann Plastics, Seemann Fiberglass and then Seemann Composites, for example. In that simple sequence of name changes you have the history of the plastics industry over the past 50 years. And thanks to a $2.1 million, 35-job expansion in Gulfport announced in September 2020 by Seemann Composites, you have the future, too.

“The Seemann Composites team would like to thank Gov. Tate Reeves, the Mississippi Development Authority and the Harrison County Development Commission for assisting in this important expansion of our facility,” said Seemann Composites President Sid Charbonnet. “We are grateful for their support as we continue to grow our workforce and capabilities here in South Mississippi.”

The expansion — the company’s sixth — accommodates a new contract to produce composite components for the U.S. Navy, and involves the construction of a 16,000-sq.-ft. addition onto the company’s existing 160,000-sq.-ft. facility. Seemann Composites has developed its own vacuum-infusion technology known as Seemann Composites Resin Infusion Molding Process, or SCRIMP, which today is used in applications around the globe.

The process came from decades
of R&D as Bill Seemann and his staff built fiberglass boats and distributed composite materials throughout the Gulf Coast region. After starting out with a small boat repair firm named Leda Boat Works in the early 1960s, Seemann’s flair for invention led to building Olympic Fin Racing Dinghies and to patenting a composite material called C-Flex that dominated racing yacht sailing circuits around the world, says a company history.

The company today primarily focuses on production components for Department of Defense and commercial platforms, and has fabricated and delivered thousands of advanced composite structures and products (of all sizes and levels of complexity) to all branches of the U.S. military, many major defense and commercial customers. And it maintains R&D capabilities in order to stay ahead of the game from its perch on 15 acres in Gulfport.

Good idea: The American Composites Manufacturers Association, whose Certified Composites Technician (CCT) program is the industry’s gold standard for comprehensive composites manufacturing training, says in its most recent industry update that the composites end-product market is expected to reach $113.2 billion by 2022.

“Seemann Composites Inc.’s success is largely accredited to the dedication and talent of its workforce,” says the company. The plastics talent base along the Mississippi Gulf Coast is well known thanks to the legacy of the University of Southern Mississippi and the Mississippi Polymer Institute (MPI) in Hattiesburg. The MPI — created from within USM’s Department of Polymer Science in 1993 — has worked with nearly 600 clients in the state and nearly 260 from outside the state, helping to train 4,162 workers and helping companies create or retain 914 other jobs.

A decade ago it outgrew its place of origin and moved to a $28 million complex called The Accelerator that offered more than 60,000 sq. ft. of resources and talent “to support ventures in composites, polymers, formulation science, biotechnology, sustainable chemistry, alternative energy and other high-tech industries.” The Accelerator’s ecosystem has since expanded too, evolving into the University of Southern Mississippi Innovation and Commercialization Park (The Innovation Park), whose assets even include a low-ropes and dual zipline challenge course at Lake Sehoy designed for teams wanting to enhance morale, leadership and communication. The area is also home to Petal High School, known for a unique plastics and composites education program.

It’s that ecosystem that has made a good home for companies such as Hybrid Plastics, which makes a nanostructured chemical called POS® — or Polyhedral Oligomeric Silsesquioxane — that bridges the gap between ceramic and organic materials and is used by a variety of industries. “As an entrepreneur, Mississippi is extremely attractive,” said Hybrid Plastics President and CEO Joe Lichtenhan in a recently filmed testimonial, “one reason being
there is no state tax on capital gains.” The spinout from an Air Force research lab was set up in California for many years, but, he said, “what we had sought was a manufacturing facility in a state that was manufacturing-friendly.” What they found was a school in Southern Miss that “focused on training its students to be problem solvers” and a state where “workers are really focused on development of a career, and doing their part to make a company successful and growing.” He’s also found all the regulatory agencies accessible.

“We have a much larger global footprint than we ever could have achieved in California,” said Lichtenan. “Nanotechnology in Mississippi works.”

**MATERIALS IN FLIGHT**

Not all Mississippi plastics talent and assets are confined to the Hattiesburg region. Just to the south in Hancock County — home to NASA’s renowned John C. Stennis Space Center — can be found operations from such prominent global plastics and chemicals companies as SABIC, SNF Polychemie and DAK Americas.

Journey north to Batesville and you’ll find GE Aviation’s composites facility, inaugurated 13 years ago, where parts are made for such engines as the GENx for Boeing’s 787 Dreamliner jets; the world’s most powerful jet engine, the GE9X; the LEAP engine and the Passport business jet engine.

As Mississippi State University’s campus in Starkville, not far from Alabama’s western boundary, a research program partially funded by the FAA and conducted by the Mississippi State University Advanced Composites Institute (ACI) was launched in September 2020 to identify and meet needs within resin infusion technology for aerospace applications. Among the assets at MSU is a robotic stitching machine with an eight-foot reach and capable of 40-ft. X-axis travel to be found at the recently inaugurated Marvin B. Dow Stitched Composites Development Center.

The ACI is part of MSU’s Raspet Flight Research Laboratory, the nation’s leading academic research institute dedicated exclusively to the advancement of Unmanned Aircraft Systems.

“The Advanced Composites Institute is a great example of how universities can work with federal and industry partners to be at the forefront of emerging technologies, creating economic opportunity in Mississippi and throughout the aerospace sector,” said MSU Interim Vice President for Research and Economic Development Julie Jordan when distinguished polymer scientist and business leader Christopher Bounds was named to lead it in summer 2020. “Dr. Bounds brings extensive experience to ACI and will strengthen the center’s top-flight research and development capabilities.”

Raspet is the only institution in the world that is designated both

“If companies have a problem that involves advanced composites, we can solve it. We’ll come up with a proposal then fabricate and execute it.”

—Christopher Bounds, Director, Advanced Composites Institute, Mississippi State University, MSU ALUMNUS magazine
as the FAA’s UAS Safety Research Facility and as official UAS Test Sites for both the FAA and the Department of Homeland Security. Home to a fleet of the largest and most capable unmanned aircraft in academic use, Raspet has secured over $50 million in federal research and testing contracts since 2017 and remains a world leader in composite materials research.

PLASTICS PROJECT ROUNDUP

- Supported by workforce training assistance from the Mississippi Development Authority and tax exemptions from Lee County, Auto Parts Manufacturing Mississippi recently invested $100 million and created 50 jobs at its plant in Guntown, increasing production to support the Toyota Mississippi plant in Blue Springs.

- Gigantic Bag in May 2020 announced it was adding 100 jobs as it began to manufacture hospital gowns at a former power association building east of McComb.

- Cooper Tire & Rubber continues to invest in its Tupelo plant, which in 2019 was honored with the Best Industrial/Manufacturing Energy Efficiency Project award by the Mississippi Energy Coordinators Association. The work of the Tupelo plant served as a pilot for similar upgrades to be made across other Cooper manufacturing facilities.

- In March 2021, Leisure Pools one of the world’s largest composite fiberglass swimming pool, spa and tanning ledge manufacturers, finalized plans to establish manufacturing and distribution operations at Picayune Industrial Park. The project is a $3.25 million corporate investment and will create 100 jobs.

“This year has gotten off to a strong start for economic development in Mississippi,” said Mississippi Development Authority Executive Director John Rounsaville, “and this announcement that Leisure Pools is bringing so many good manufacturing jobs to the Mississippi Gulf Coast Region continues that exciting momentum. The goal of MDA is to build stronger communities through job creation and investment, and we appreciate the teams at Pearl River County Economic Development, the Pearl River County Board of Supervisors and Mississippi Power for working with MDA to help us achieve our goals for the people of Mississippi.”

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Commodities produced by Mississippi’s 34,700 farms each year contribute $7 billion to the state’s economy. Getting them to market is crucial to ensuring that value is maintained.

Enter Express Grain Terminals, which originate grain from producers at three locations in the heart of the Mississippi Delta: Sidon, Minter and Greenwood in central Mississippi. The company ships by truck and rail from its 110-car unit train loader at Sidon to markets in Mississippi and Alabama, and to exporters at the Gulf. The company also processes soybeans at its plant in Greenwood, from which some of the oil is further processed to biodiesel on site or sold to animal feed producers or other biodiesel plants. The soybean meal and hulls find their way into animal feed that goes to area poultry, catfish, swine, and cattle feed mills and producers.

John Coleman, the 43-year-old president of Express Grain Terminals, grew up in the region, and after a stint putting his electrical engineering and software design skills to work elsewhere, he came back home. Spurred by the increase in soybean and corn acreage in the area brought on by renewable fuel incentives and a drought in the Midwest, he started planning a grain elevator in 2007, building on a thick network of farmer customers to jump-start a facility that has since expanded over the years. Farmers previously had to move crops 280 miles by rail and truck for export. Now the products are sourced and sold domestically within 100 miles.

“We knew this area needed more grain infrastructure,” Coleman says. That need only increased around 2013 after Bunge shut down the region’s last soybean processing facility. As it happened, a former cottonseed processing plant in Greenwood built around 1900 and used by a succession of companies came up for sale. “We ended up buying that, retooling it for soybeans, and started up in 2016,” Coleman says, and his company rehired the 50 folks who had lost their cottonseed plant jobs. “We’ve been doing that ever since, and we are trying to grow the capacity of the plant now,” he says of the state’s only soybean processing plant.

In an April 2021 update, Coleman wrote, “Even before the short soybean stocks that have occurred this year, we have been investing in our crush plant to try to satisfy...
both the Mississippi meal demand from catfish and poultry markets and the soybean oil demand due to the continued growth of renewable fuels.” The plan calls for doubling capacity to 2 million bushels per month, and then double again to 4 million bushels per month in five to 10 years. “This would be about where we would saturate the meal market in Mississippi, but this assumes no growth in livestock feed,” he wrote. “We just want more farmers and more livestock to come around.”

Meanwhile, growth in biodiesel sales and other renewable fuel plants are increasing demand for soybean oil. “The new demand is being driven by low carbon fuel incentives (LCFS credits) primarily from the West Coast — California, Oregon, and British Columbia,” Coleman wrote in his spring update. “These states are pulling biofuels from the entire U.S. and their appetite is large. There are several other states like Washington that are considering LCFS as well. Currently, we are seeing a build-out of new renewable fuel plants that will be online within a year to satisfy the LCFS demand. I have spoken to representatives from two projects who want our soybean oil. At our current capacity, we would not be able to supply what they want. But, with the planned capacity increases we will be able to take care of them.”

The Express Grain team has used New Markets Tax Credit transactions along the way to first buy and retool the cottonseed plant, then to build the biodiesel plant, and, in 2020, to expand capacity. The company has benefited from Mississippi Development Authority support in building and upgrading roads into the plant site and securing property tax abatements through the state’s Advantage Jobs incentive, which provides for a 90% rebate of Mississippi payroll taxes to qualified employers for a period of up to 10 years, provided the employer pays an average annual wage of 110% of the average annual county or state wage, whichever is less, and creates 25 new, full-time jobs.

Today the growing Express Grain operations employ around 180 across the three sites. The company also supports the work taking place at hundreds of farms in the region, each of which employs anywhere from three to 10 workers, Coleman estimates. Many of those farmers would likely echo his sentiment: “Agriculture is in my blood,” he says.

NEW CROP

Among other projects in the agribusiness space:

Nufarm Americas, the U.S. arm of the Australia-based crop protection and seed treatment company, in fall 2019 held the grand opening for its new $20 million herbicide manufacturing plant in Greenville, broadening the company’s footprint beyond its Chicago-area operations. “This is a facility where we can work more closely with our distribution partners to service the needs of farmers,” said Nufarm CEO Greg Hunt.

Enviva operates wood pellet plants in Amory and Lucedale, Mississippi, and a port facility at the Port of Pascagoula, part of an estimated 4,200 jobs and nearly $3 billion in annual economic impact the company aims to create across the U.S. Southeast. The company supports nearly 550 jobs across Mississippi and has invested $300 million in the state. Those numbers may grow soon, as a new plant is constructed in Lucedale, another is moving toward development in Bond (near the Port of Pascagoula), and a Pascagoula terminal expansion is expected to be complete in 2021 that will take throughput capacity to more than 3 million metric tons per year.
Coming off a year of solid growth in the timber business, Mississippi ushered in 2021 in style in January when Biewer Lumber announced it would build a new $130 million sawmill and create 150 jobs in Winona.

“The growth of companies like Biewer Lumber in Mississippi sends a strong message that our state has a supportive business environment and a skilled workforce,” Gov. Tate Reeves said. “Biewer Lumber’s construction and expansion of the sawmill in Newton and the construction of a new sawmill in Winona and the creation of these jobs is a testament to that fact.”

A family-owned firm based in St. Clair, Michigan, Biewer operates a total of five sawmills consisting of two in Michigan, two in Wisconsin and one in Newton, Mississippi.

“My family’s passion for the lumber industry has prompted this expansion in the South,” said Tim Biewer, president and CEO of the company. “There is no better place to grow the business than the fiber-rich state of Mississippi.”

Biewer is not alone. All around the state, lumber companies are shelling out big bucks to expand their operations and increase the size of their workforce. Agribusiness is Mississippi’s largest employer, as nearly 30% of workers in the state work in this sector. Mississippi forests cover 19.6 million acres, comprising 65% of the state. Forestry-related jobs employ approximately one out of every four factory workers in the state; and the value of production for Mississippi’s No. 3 commodity, timber, tops $1 billion each year.

Bud Reaves, division controller for Timber Products Company, spoke for many when he said: “Timber Products Company is very excited about expanding its operations in Corinth. This expansion is providing us with a more diversified product offering, allowing us to enter new markets, create new jobs and help protect existing jobs.”
Timber Products Company is joined by such notable names as Weyerhaeuser, Georgia-Pacific and TimberCorp in Mississippi. Last year, the state landed significant corporate facility expansion investments from Idaho Forest Group, Vicksburg Forest Products and Hankins Lumber.

Idaho Forest Group announced last December that it would locate sawmill operations in Lumberton in Lamar County. The $120 million investment is expected to create up to 135 jobs. Based in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, IFG currently operates six sawmills and a finger-joint plant at locations in Idaho and Montana. IFG has the capacity to produce more than 1 billion board feet per year, making it one of the country’s largest lumber producers.

Vicksburg Forest Products, meanwhile, announced last September that it would expand its lumber mill operations in Vicksburg. The $40 million investment creates 60 jobs.

VFP first purchased the Vicksburg sawmill in 2018. The plant underwent a large-scale modernization and now produces about 75 million board feet of Southern Yellow Pine lumber per year. The expansion will enable VFP to produce 180 million board feet of lumber annually.

Finally, Hankins Lumber announced last November that it would expand its footprint in Grenada County by investing $12.5 million into a new sawmill and hiring 43 new workers. Hankins has operated in Grenada County for nearly half a century. The firm employs 140 workers at its existing facility there. The new facility will produce about 40 million board feet of lumber each year.

“My family’s passion for the lumber industry has prompted this expansion in the South. There is no better place to grow the business than the fiber-rich state of Mississippi.”

— Tim Biewer, President & CEO, Biewer Lumber
The company has been operating in the Mississippi Delta for more than four decades, producing the widely recognized “Uncle Ben’s” rice products. But change is in the air, and Mars has listened and learned. After committing to a change that departed from the inequities associated with the name and face of the former brand, in May 2021 it debuted its new line of “Ben’s Original” products.

“Ben’s Original™ is not just a name and packaging change — we believe everyone deserves to feel welcome, heard and have access to nutritious food,” said Rafael Narvaez, Global CMO and R&D officer, Mars Food. “That’s why we’ve committed to taking actions based on insights from thousands of consumers, as well as our own associates, that are designed to enhance inclusion and equity in service of our new brand purpose to create meals, experiences and opportunities that offer everyone a seat at the table.”

“Today is a big moment for Ben’s Original™,” said Denis Yarotskiy, regional president, Mars Food North America. “We recognize we have much more work to do as we bring our new brand purpose to life to offer everyone a seat at the table. We remain committed to delivering this ambition.”

Yarotskiy shared his perspective with us, casting further light on the business climate for Mississippi’s food companies and the community’s role as a model location for such meaningful change.

**MARS FOOD NORTH AMERICA IS TRANSFORMING. MISSISSIPPI IS THE PLACE THE COMPANY HAS CHOSEN TO TRANSFORM IN THE PROCESS.**

_by ADAM BRUNS_

Describe the company’s history of operations and continued investment in Mississippi.

**Denis Yarotskiy:** We are very proud of our 40-plus-year history in Greenville, Mississippi. The factory opened in 1978, producing only conventional brown rice. Now, it’s home to hundreds of different products across our Mars Food brands (including Ben’s Original and Seeds of Change) in a variety of formats for dry rice and ready-to-heat rice and grains.

Over the years, we have continued to invest in both operations at the site — leading it to be the largest Mars Food factory in the world — and the Greenville community, with much more to come as part of our $2.5 million commitment over the next five years to work toward an equitable future.

The site’s location in the heart of the Delta means that we are close to where the majority of our rice is sourced and have built longstanding relationships with farmers, collaborating on critical priorities like developing and implementing more sustainable rice farming practices. It also means that most of our rice products sold in North America pass through the Greenville facility. Our investments in the manufacturing site — more than $200 million over our 40-plus-year history — have allowed us to expand production, including increasing our capacity significantly in the last year following the installation of a state-of-the-art upgrade to our ready-to-heat line.
MISSISSIPPI AND SANDERSON FARMS.
A successful recipe since 1947.

From a modest feed-and-seed store in small-town Mississippi to one of the largest poultry producers in the country, Sanderson Farms is proud of our Mississippi heritage. Our employees, the family farmers who raise our chickens, the folks who help us host the Sanderson Farms Championship, and the people who call Mississippi home are at the heart of everything we do.
What are the Greenville area’s strengths and challenges in terms of regulatory/permitting environment, talent and skills, cost of doing business, logistics, infrastructure, supplier network, etc.?

Yarotskiy: We chose Greenville as the home of our only U.S. Mars Food factory for many reasons — importantly, its proximity to rice farms throughout the Delta and strong support from the community and the city of Greenville. We regularly collaborate with Mayor Errick D. Simmons office on a variety of topics, from infrastructure and site-related projects to pressing community needs and challenges.

When we began work on the Ben’s Original rebrand last year, we first engaged with the mayor’s office and key local stakeholders (elected officials and community thought leaders) who have been instrumental in helping us develop appropriate plans to evolve our global brand while focusing on the community in which we operate.

We will continue to work with the mayor and other partners (nonprofit and companies) as we solidify our plans to work toward an equitable future by enhancing educational opportunities for area students, as well as furthering access to healthier foods for area residents.

You have chosen the Greenville area to be the model for the company’s approach to inclusiveness and equity. Describe the deliberate process you have gone through since your brand change announced last June, and how you hope to roll things out in Mississippi and more broadly within Mars.

Yarotskiy: As part of our rebranding and to bring to life the brand purpose of creating opportunities that offer everyone a seat at the table, Mars Food committed to investing $2.5 million over the next five years in the local Greenville community to work toward an equitable future by enhancing educational opportunities for area students, as well as furthering access to healthier foods for area residents.

In January of this year, Kyla Washington joined our Corporate Affairs team as Mars Food’s first-ever Community Engagement Officer (based in Greenville). Kyla has deep roots in Greenville, Mississippi. She grew up in Greenville, attended Greenville Weston High School before attaining her bachelor’s degree from Mississippi State University and is currently working on her MBA in Public Administration at Belhaven University. Most recently, Kyla worked as the executive assistant and PR director for the City of Greenville, where she was key in ensuring an ongoing collaborative partnership between the city, Mayor Errick D. Simmons and Mars Food.

Since joining us, Kyla has been immersing in conversations and listening to the community, stakeholders and our Associates to determine the investment strategies that will positively and sustainably impact Greenville. She will continue to strengthen relationships with existing community partners — including Hearty Helpings Food Pantry, Boys and Girls Club of Washington County, Washington County Economic Alliance — and area junior colleges to upskill local talent, including training programs and job fairs.

PROJECT ROUNDUP: FROM CATFISH TO ZOMBIE BRAIN-JUICE

There’s no shortage of food companies operating and growing in Mississippi. Go to any of the 11 Penn’s Restaurant locations surrounding Jackson and you can get a fried or grilled catfish Dinner #1 featuring fish farmed at Superior Catfish, a previously 140-job company which recently expanded with a 25-job, $17 million investment in Macon. Oregon–based Asian and ethnic specialty frozen food manufacturer and marketer Ajinomoto North America not long ago made a $27.3 million, 76-job investment in Oakland, in Yalobusha County, raising its head count to 450. Wayne Farms is investing $16.9 million and adding 200 jobs at its poultry production facility in Laurel, bringing employment to 550.

Brewery Lazy Magnolia not only shifted to hand sanitizer production during the pandemic (which added jobs instead of subtracting them), but installed a new canning line to boot. The oldest brewery in Mississippi also formed new partnerships. One was with Texas-based Richard’s Rainwater to introduce the company’s line of packaged rainwater in bottles and cans — after all, the Mississippi Coast records around 5 inches of rain a month. Another was with Connecticut-based Avery’s Sodas, which has been making soda for more than 100 years. Lazy Magnolia packages varieties of Avery’s Totally Gross Sodas known for colorful names like Unicorn Yack and Zombie Brain-Juice. Meanwhile, one of Lazy Magnolia’s newest beers has a name just right for 2021: “New Normal.”
For decades, Mississippi has been a strategic stronghold for many life sciences, biotechnology and healthcare firms. Pioneering research conducted in the state has lead to innovations in organ transplants, nanotechnology and more. In addition to the state’s strong business climate, Mississippi’s robust healthcare workforce is bolstered by two medical schools, five four-year institutions with nursing schools, and many healthcare occupational programs.

Thanks to the state’s accessibility and deep talent pool, Spectra Laboratories, a wholly owned subsidiary of Fresenius Medical Care North America, is building a new 200,000-sq.-ft. lab in Southaven. The project is expected to create more than 300 new jobs in the first few years, with the new facility expected to become fully operational later this summer.

Fresenius Medical Care North America (FMCNA) is a leading provider of kidney care products and services for individuals with chronic renal conditions. Spectra Laboratories offers renal-specific laboratory services, using state-of-the-art equipment, automated specimen processing and reporting applications. At Spectra’s new build-to-suit facility, which will be located in the Stateline Business Park, employees will conduct comprehensive testing, analysis and reporting to ensure the best possible outcomes for patients.

“We serve more than 200,000 patients with kidney disease across the U.S, so it was important for us to find a central location, near major transportation hubs like FedEx that could provide the fastest possible results for the Western part of the country,” said Ines Dahne-Steuber, President of Spectra Laboratories, and SVP of Operational Excellence for FMCNA. “The Southaven area is clearly developing rapidly with a strong workforce needed to run our advanced laboratory equipment. Our new Southaven lab will enable us to better accommodate long-term needs by introducing state-of-the-art automation capabilities while expanding our footprint to be closer to some of our higher-volume markets.

“Throughout the selection process, we reached out to state and regional leaders in Mississippi. Their excellent support and partnership were key deciding factors in our site selection. We are excited to further invest in providing a state-of-the-art healthcare facility and being an employer of choice in the rapidly growing Southaven area.”

The Mississippi Development Authority is assisting with workforce training and site improvements. MDA also is supporting the project through the Advantage Jobs and Healthcare Industry Zone Incentive programs. The city of Southaven is assisting with a new traffic signal, and the city and DeSoto County are providing partial property tax exemptions to Spectra Laboratories.
HEALTHCARE ECOSYSTEM SPURS GROWTH

Louisiana-based Westport Linen began operations in Greenville in December, representing a $5.8 million corporate investment expected to create 75 jobs and retain another 75 existing jobs.

Headquartered in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Westport Linen purchased Broadway Linen Services in Greenville and will modernize the facility with three new manufacturing lines, allowing the company to process larger volumes of healthcare linens. The Greenville location also allows for greater optimization of Westport Linen’s supply chain network, reaching Arkansas, northern Alabama and southwest Tennessee. Westport Linen currently serves the healthcare industries in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas through three modern plants, which combined are capable of processing more than 82 million pounds of healthcare linens per year.

“We are extremely excited and fortunate to work with the city of Greenville, Washington County and the Mississippi Development Authority. Our commitment is in creating a consistent job base that allows the employees to grow and excel in all facets of their careers,” said Westport Linen CEO and Founding Member Eddie Lefeaux. “Our investment in technology and the latest equipment will ensure that we are here for the long term. Our clients will soon see that reliability and dependability with our products and services.”

MDA is providing assistance for workforce training. Westport Linen also qualifies for the Growth and Prosperity Program, which designates specific counties as GAP counties and provides income, franchise, sales and property tax incentives to companies that locate or expand in these areas of Mississippi. The program is designed to encourage development in economically challenged areas of the state.

“The local economic development team and government officials have been tremendous partners and helpful throughout the process,” said Dahne-Stueber. “Southaven is growing and provides an exciting area for business with access to a major metro area with great transportation options and a talented workforce. We are excited to become part of this growing business community.”

STRATEGIC DISTRIBUTION IN NORTH MISSISSIPPI

Also in Southaven, Medline Industries Inc., a healthcare business specializing in manufacturing and distributing medical supplies, recently opened its new distribution operation. The $46-million investment also brings 450 new jobs in the North Mississippi region.

Southaven has several ideal attributes for the company’s new, larger warehouse facility that will accommodate continued growth, including convenient access to the Southeastern U.S. market, a quality local workforce and high quality of life. Medline’s existing employees in Memphis will fill a portion of the new jobs at its new Southaven location, with a large number of jobs being created for Mississippi residents.

“We are looking forward to being an active part of the new Southaven community,” said Dmitry Dukhan, vice president of Real Estate Operations for Medline. “It’s an ideal location for a distribution hub for our larger mid-south distribution territory and enables us to expand our presence as a local employer. We are grateful to all of the people and officials in Southaven, the county of DeSoto and the state of Mississippi who have recognized the potential of this project for both local residents and healthcare throughout the region.”

The Mississippi Development Authority is assisting with equipment relocation and infrastructure needs, including the extensions of a potable water line and an access road. The city of Southaven and DeSoto County is helping with the project, as well.

ZIMMER BIOMET GROWS IN OLIVE BRANCH

In October 2019, leading medical device manufacturer and supplier Zimmer Biomet announced it would locate a new facility in Olive Branch and create 100 new jobs. The Indiana-based company leased a 120,000 sq. ft. facility from where it will distribute its products to medical facilities worldwide.

“Zimmer Biomet is excited to locate this important distribution facility in Olive Branch where we can leverage great shipping logistics and a highly qualified local workforce,” said Zimmer Biomet Director of Operations Josh Stapleton. “We appreciate the support of the Mississippi Development Authority and local leaders to encourage this expansion.”
Coastal Mississippi’s Banner Year

DESPITE TOURISM SLOW DOWN, COASTAL MISSISSIPPI CONTINUES TO DRAW A CROWD.

While Mississippi — like many other states — experienced a slow in tourism as one of the many impacts of COVID-19, the tri-county area of Coastal Mississippi has seen successes and growth in the past year. It’s one of the highest-performing destinations in the nation in 2020.

While nationally, room demand was down 35% between December 2020 and February 2021, Coastal Mississippi only saw a decrease of 15.5%. Additionally, Coastal Mississippi’s occupancy only decreased by 9.9%, compared to the national average decrease of 33.3.

We recently spoke with Milton Segarra, CEO of Coastal Mississippi, about the region’s robust tourism sector and what comes next as the region heals from the pandemic’s effects.

What might people be surprised to learn about the Coastal Mississippi area?

Segarra: As travelers seek to discover new experiences, cultures, lifestyles, cuisine and places, regularly using terms such as “hidden gem,” “undiscovered,” and “unexpected,” Coastal Mississippi — The Secret Coast is perfectly poised to surprise and delight as a region that offers all the relaxation, adventure, space to roam, and variety that travelers want without the overexposure that they don’t.

The Secret Coast’s temperate climate, along with its astounding natural beauty and rich, unique culture, makes for the perfect year-round destination. There is an incredible amount to do, see and experience across Coastal Mississippi’s 12 beautiful coastal communities: from outdoor activities, such as kayaking, boating, fishing and hiking, to a wide variety of attractions, museums, festivals, world-class gaming and championship golf courses. When it comes to food, this is the place to be! From quaint coastal seafood spots to fine dining, we’ve got it all. In short, Coastal

Biloxi’s MGM Park is home to the Double-A Biloxi Shuckers baseball team. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Mississippi checks all the boxes: great food, great weather, great prices, great people, and a great way of life.

How has the region’s tourism sector fared since the start of the pandemic?

Segarra: Tourism is the lifeblood of Mississippi’s tri-county coastal region. While the impact of COVID-19 has inarguably been indelible, Coastal Mississippi has nonetheless seen successes and growth in the past year. Mississippi was the top travel spending market in the U.S. in 2020, and Coastal Mississippi accounts for one-third of the state’s tourism employees, expenditures and taxes. This places Coastal Mississippi as one of the highest performing destinations in the nation last year.

Thanks to state leadership and unwavering dedication displayed by the Coastal Delegation, Coastal Mississippi was awarded $3.4 million from the Tourism Recovery Fund, providing the tools and resources needed to drive visitor demand and fuel recovery for the community. Additionally, Coastal Mississippi will be receiving a $2 million CARES Act Recovery Assistance Grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration. These valuable resources will help support and further the strategic redevelopment and revitalization of the region in response to the damaging impacts left by the coronavirus pandemic. With continued prioritization of the health and safety of the tourism and hospitality industry, Coastal Mississippi is confident that this grant will provide a strong return on investment, leading to an increase in visitors and economic activity along The Secret Coast.

In collaboration with community leaders, industry professionals, health care partners and research initiatives, Coastal Mississippi created the Coastal Mississippi Recovery Plan to continue the momentum built prior to COVID-19 and ensure a strong economic future. This plan is based on the following framework: Consumer sentiment and intent to travel; The readiness of the destination for tourism; Input from partners and stakeholders, and Industry and competitive analysis.

Are visitors starting to return for vacations and/or conferences and events?

Segarra: Coastal Mississippi is perfectly poised to welcome visitors to a destination with an abundance of safe, enjoyable adventures, small coastal communities offering unique experiences, plenty of space to roam, and Southern hospitality at its finest. In fact, our research shows that intent to visit Coastal Mississippi ranks higher than Pensacola, Gulf Shores/Orange Beach, Baton Rouge and Lake Charles over the next 18 months.
1. **Affordability:** Mississippi offers the lowest cost of living out of all 50 states. According to U.S. News & World Report, the state’s average cost of living index is 84.10. The U.S. average cost of living index is 100. Housing is affordable as well, with an average price of $252,725.

2. **Higher Education:** Mississippi is home to some of the best public universities in the country, including four renowned research institutions, one medical school and several public-private research and development partnerships across the state. Mississippi’s 15 community and junior colleges provide the state’s workforce with a wide variety of education and training programs.
3. Southern Charm: From the Appalachian foothills in north Mississippi to the Gulf Coast, Mississippi offers an extensive sampling of southern hospitality and charm. Popular cities to visit include Oxford, Bay St. Louis, Ocean Springs, Natchez, Tupelo and Hattiesburg.

4. Adventure Abounds: Mississippi’s outdoor amenities are extensive. For those who enjoy canoeing, kayaking, cycling, hiking, fishing and hunting, Mississippi is a haven of outdoorsmanship and adventure. Mississippi is home to 24 state parks, eight national parks and three cultural heritage areas. Outside of the Delta area, the state is heavily forested with a number of national forests and wildlife refuges.

5. Secret Coast: The Mississippi Gulf Coast’s beautiful beaches offer a wealth of outdoor adventures, including paddling and deep-sea fishing, with over 60 miles of gorgeous white sand beaches. The coastal region is also known as the “Playground of the South” because it boasts unlimited entertainment with casinos, restaurants and clubs.
6. Unique Culture: Known as the “Birthplace of America’s Music,” Mississippi’s artistic, cultural heritage and history are vast and storied. Several museums and historic marker trails across the state highlight different aspects, including the Country Music and Blues Trails, Jackson Museum, the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, the GRAMMY Museum, and the Museum of Mississippi History.

7. Sports: From tailgating college football games at Mississippi State University, Ole Miss or Southern Miss, to enjoying the back nine at one of the state’s more than 140 golf courses, Mississippi offers something for sports enthusiasts across the board.
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A MAN WHO STOPS ADVERTISING TO SAVE MONEY IS LIKE A MAN WHO STOPS A CLOCK TO SAVE TIME.

— HENRY FORD
Mighty strong. Mighty responsive.

From specialized armored vehicles to high-tech auto parts, Mississippi is mighty in automotive manufacturing. Our workforce training system provides the employees you need to build the vehicles of tomorrow.

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