Redstone answers your

Running your own business is an exciting, yet nerve-racking adventure. There are so many details to take care of on so many different levels. At Redstone Federal Credit Union®, we’ve helped many of our Tennessee Valley neighbors start and run their own companies. Here, we will share some of the questions we hear most often from small business owners. Hopefully our answers will help you as well!

1] What’s the best checking account for a small business?

Managing the cash flow is often a big headache for small businesses, so look for a checking account which has little to no impact on that cash flow. You can reduce any negative impact by getting an account with no monthly fee and a generous transaction allowance. Also look for a financial institution that provides discounts to other business services as a part of the checking account relationship.

At Redstone Federal Credit Union, our Endeavor Checking is perfect for small businesses. With no monthly fee, 500 free transactions a month, and a low deposit required to get started, our small business members are given the best opportunity for growth. This account also provides a gateway to other great Redstone business services, such as a discount on wire transfers. You can even earn CashBack with this account by using the business debit card for your purchases!

2] How can a small business owner prepare for unexpected expenses?

Redstone Federal Credit Union recommends business owners develop a solid savings plan. Having cash in a safe place, but accessible, will give you a cushion for dealing with unexpected expenses. A healthy savings account balance will also help build your assets, a key aspect in any conversations you might have with a lender.

Take a look at the options available for savings. There could be ways your cash might even earn dividends! At Redstone, our Endeavor Savings account earns dividends and is easily accessible. You can earn more dividends by putting cash into a Money Market account.

Cash Management  |  Merchant Services  |  Business Loans & Accounts

Must be RFCU® member or Membership Partner to open a business account, obtain a loan, or use any service. Must be eligible for membership and open a share savings account to become a member. A $5 minimum balance is required to open share savings account and must be maintained in share account at all times.

Minimum deposits, account balances, and transaction fees apply to some business accounts. Business owner must visit a branch to complete checking account setup. Signature is required for obtaining a Business Visa Debit Card. The minimum balance for the Endeavor Money Market account tier must be maintained to earn the annual percentage yield applicable for that tier.

Business Debit Card CashBack is a debit card reward program for business members with an Endeavor Plus Checking Account. With Business Debit Card CashBack, you will receive 10-cents CashBack for every Point of Sale (POS) debit card transaction you complete after the first four POS transactions per month from an Endeavor Plus Checking account. Business Debit Card CashBack rewards will be posted on the 5th calendar day of each month. Only active Endeavor Plus Checking accounts
Small Business questions!

3] The Cash Management industry is moving so fast. How do I keep up?

Business owners have plenty to track in their daily activities and in their long-term strategies for growth. Those who are successful learn to lean on experts to handle certain parts of the business, such as cash management and collection or business lending. For instance, Redstone Federal Credit can show you how the latest in cash management could actually save you time and money! Electronic payments are a great way to reduce paper, save time in getting paid and paying others as well as reducing the likelihood of fraud.

And speaking of experts, John Maner, Assistant Vice President, Business Solutions at Redstone, recommends all business owners have a core group of experts as their partners.

“Know who your partners are. Make sure you have a banker, an attorney, an accountant and an insurance agent you can count on,” says Mr. Maner. “Their expertise will give you and your business a great foundation.”

4] My company is really small, is it necessary to have a separate credit card for my business?

Keeping your personal and business expenses separate is key to managing finances for both sides of your life. Having a business credit card will provide an easy way for you to track what you are buying and from whom. This will help with accounting, tax reporting, and analyzing your cash flow.

When shopping for a business credit card, look for one with benefits and rewards that work well with your style of business. For instance, some business owners travel a lot and can use rewards or points as a card benefit. Some business owners who stay close to their home base may prefer cards with lower rates and fees instead. At Redstone, we offer lower rates, no annual fee, rewards, and even discounts when the card is used at certain retailers. If you have employees who purchase items on the company’s behalf, they can use a card tied to your account, but with their own line of credit. This separation helps to hold everyone accountable.

5] Who can I talk to in order to get started?

Whether you need guidance on developing a business plan or just want to get your business services in order, come see the Business Solutions team at Redstone Federal Credit Union. Patrick Pearson, Brooke Bell, or Jared Love on our Business Solutions team loves helping small businesses thrive. Give them a call today at 256-327-1104.

Call us to get started, or visit redfcu.org/momentum
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WHERE, WHY, AND HOW OUR COMMUNITY COMPETES
During the State of the State Address on January 9, Governor Kay Ivey announced the Alabama School of Cyber and Engineering (ASCE), the state’s third magnet school. The mission of the ASCE is to provide academically motivated and gifted Alabama students with educational opportunities and experiences in the rapidly growing fields of cyber and engineering.

The two magnet schools currently run by the state are the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham and the Alabama School of Mathematics and Science in Mobile.

Let’s explore how we got to this point.

BACKGROUND

The new magnet school is actually the third idea birthed through Cyber Huntsville, an initiative announced by Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle in 2010 to meet the need for cyber professionals, research, and growth in this field.

Cyber Huntsville is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit organization made up of industry, government, and academic institutions dedicated to making Huntsville and the Tennessee Valley region a nationally and internationally recognized cyber leader.

Cyber Huntsville’s work has already led to the National Cyber Summit, an annual event held in Huntsville that now attracts thousands of cyber security professionals and agencies such as the National Security Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The group also worked to establish U.S. Cyber Camp at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center. In August of 2017, Gov. Ivey announced $10 million to support construction and curriculum for a permanent home for the camp to be located at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center. To date, two Cyber Camps have been held with plans for more sessions this year, soon opening it to students from across the region and nation.

With these two pieces in place, Cyber Huntsville and the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber looked ahead for more possibilities.

DEFINING THE NEED: WORKFORCE

The Huntsville area has the highest concentration of engineering and technical workforce in the United States, but jobs consistently go unfilled due to a lack of candidates with adequate education and skills to meet the need. Today, there are more than 2,300 open cyber positions in the Huntsville area and over 4,000 open positions statewide. Nationally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects an increase of more than 800,000 jobs in cyber and engineering related fields over the next 10 years.

DATA BREACHES

According to a 2016 Symantec Internet Security Report, half a billion personal records were stolen or lost in data breaches. This cost American companies an average of $4 million per breach, not to mention damage to their reputation and long-term value.

But the person doing the hacking doesn’t often fit the profile of what you might have in your mind.

“A significant number of hacks are kids playing online, hacking other kids. However, they don’t realize what they’re doing is impacting millions of users,” said Alicia Ryan. “Let’s harness those skills for good.”

Ryan is a board member of Cyber Huntsville.
and the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber’s Vice Chair for Government and Public Affairs. Ryan, who is CEO of LSINC Corporation, says there is definitely a need for more young people to train in this field.

“We must seek motivated and talented students, we must challenge them academically by exposing them to new and exciting opportunities, and we must nurture their development to ensure they can stay the course toward an advanced degree in STEM,” said Ryan.

Ryan credits State Senator Arthur Orr with suggesting the idea of a cyber and engineering magnet school.

“The entire state of Alabama stands to benefit from having a world class institution focusing on cyber and engineering,” said Senator Orr. “Huntsville/Madison County, with its engineering and cyber strength, is the logical choice for such an institution. Local companies in these areas have been tremendous with their offers of support.”

**VISION & FUNDING**

ASCE’s vision is to educate, develop, and inspire the next generation of Alabamians to become industry leading professionals in cyber and engineering.

Alabama School for Cyber & Engineering, a 501(c)(3) foundation for ASCE, has already been established and is working to secure funding through public means as well as through private donations.

“What’s next for highly-skilled, high-paying, and in-demand jobs in rapidly growing sectors of our economy.”

“The Alabama School of Cyber and Engineering will build on that reputation by giving the next generation of innovators the opportunity to get a jump-start on careers in technology, engineering, and protecting our nation’s cyber infrastructure. I can’t think of a better place to build an institution of such magnitude and potential than in Huntsville where it will help attract, prepare, and retain some of Alabama’s best and brightest.”

**WHAT’S NEXT**

The work is well underway to take the school from concept to reality. This involves forming the framework of a staff and identifying and procuring the location.

Ryan said the team is eyeing Cummings Research Park, so it would be mostly centered for students commuting from Huntsville, Madison, and Madison County. Other students would board at the school, coming from other locations in Alabama.

Discussions are also taking place about curriculum and preparations for an initial class of high school students beginning in August 2020, contingent upon funding.

Once the school is at full operational capacity, the school could grow to serve more than 300 students per year in grades 7-12.

“The vision of Governor Ivey and myself is that the school will become a magnet for families from not only across the state but potentially from across the nation and world to move to Alabama in order to receive the highest quality education, but at no cost, in these emerging fields,” added Sen. Orr. “Further, [The University of Alabama in Huntsville] stands to gain by having a high caliber student body graduating on its doorstep who wish to pursue careers in cyber and engineering. It’s a win all the way around!”

– Claire Aiello

**The National Cyber Summit is held at the Von Braun Center in Huntsville. The Summit was started by CyberHuntsville and is the preeminent event for cyber training, education, and workforce development aimed at protecting America’s infrastructure from ever-evolving cyber threats. Huntsville is one of the nation’s largest technological hubs, and is home to many Department of Defense organizations, civilian departments, and agencies. As a result, the Summit attracts both government and commercial participants – more than 1,500 people attend annually to hear from 60-plus expert speakers and keynote addresses. The Summit will also include more than 60 dynamic sessions and more than 70 cyber-focused exhibitors. Topics to be covered include finance, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and technology. Register at nationalcybersummit.com.**
Onward and Upward

Aerojet Rocketdyne’s Presence in Huntsville Grows by the Day

The decision to move to Huntsville to work for Aerojet Rocketdyne was a no brainer for Specialist Engineer Jessica Emens.

Emens, a member of Aerojet Rocketdyne’s Engineering group, moved to Gainesville, Va., about 12 years ago after accepting an engineering position with the company. When the opportunity to relocate came available last year, Emens said she jumped on it to be closer to extended family.

“We like that Huntsville is a very family-friendly area,” Emens said. “We also like the fact that this area is more affordable for our family as compared to the northern Virginia area.”

Emens is one of many employees who have recently transferred to the company’s growing Huntsville operations. Aerojet Rocketdyne is building a 136,000-square-foot Advanced Manufacturing Facility and preparing to move to a new office space in Cummings Research Park to accommodate new employees and transfers like Emens.

ADVANCED MANUFACTURING FACILITY

Construction on the Advanced Manufacturing Facility is in the early stages in North Huntsville Industrial Park. Program Manager Jim Ramseier said grading for the building pad is complete, and grouting has been injected under the footings to provide added stability.

When the rainy weather clears, site activity will ramp up again.

“Most of the work is still in front of us,” Ramseier said. “The key efforts will be to pour the slab, pour and erect the walls, install the steel structures, and build the roof.”

Aerojet Rocketdyne plans to occupy the building in December and begin validating its processes and products next year. Production is expected to start in January 2020.

Ramseier said Aerojet Rocketdyne will move production of its composite rocket motor cases to the new building, which will start with 140 employees and grow as additional programs come online.

“We will also be handling the AR-1 rocket engine sub-system assembly should we be selected for that contract,” he said. “We are also working to include production additive manufacturing, as well.”

EXPLORER BOULEVARD

Aerojet Rocketdyne is remodeling 950 Explorer Boulevard, a 122,000-square-foot office space that will house 575 employees. Program Manager Craig Wade said the staff at 555 Discovery Drive will move there along with newly-hired workers and those from other Aerojet Rocketdyne sites.

Wade said the company is working with the building owner and contractor BL Harbert to add space and modernize the interior of the facility.

“The Huntsville area is a central location for aerospace and defense,” he said. “Aerojet Rocketdyne is building upon the presence of many of our major customers, such as Missile Defense Agency, Raytheon, Boeing, NASA, U.S. Army, and Lockheed Martin.”

Aerojet Rocketdyne expects to move to Explorer Boulevard during the second quarter of this fiscal year. Wade projects the number of transfers to the site will be about 155.

HUNTSVILLE GROWTH

The changes in Huntsville are part of a larger Competitive Improvement Program (CIP) Aerojet Rocketdyne launched in 2015. In April 2017, the company announced it would consolidate several facilities and move those operations to Huntsville over the next two years.

It was a move Aerojet Rocketdyne CEO Eileen Drake said would allow the company to “deliver the value our customers demand and position (Aerojet Rocketdyne) for further growth.”

The plan involved consolidating two of the company’s California and Virginia sites while centralizing and expanding its Huntsville presence with a new manufacturing facility for component production, additive manufacturing, composites, and research and development. The company also announced 800 new jobs to support America’s space and defense needs for the next quarter century and beyond.

‘A GREAT RELATIONSHIP THUS FAR’

Ramseier said Aerojet Rocketdyne is in the early stages of hiring for the Advanced Manufacturing Facility as its human resources team continued on page 8
begins to accept candidate applications. Most of the new positions will be filled locally by workers in the Huntsville region.

“I think Aerojet Rocketdyne and Huntsville have built a great relationship thus far, and I see that relationship getting stronger as this project progresses,” Ramseier said. “The City of Huntsville, Industrial Development Board, and the local community have gone above and beyond in welcoming [us] to the area.”

Although moving to Madison from Virginia was an easy decision, Emens said her husband had to change jobs, creating some uncertainty at first. He landed with Torch Technologies, though. The family now lives in Madison and enjoys visiting the Huntsville Botanical Garden, local breweries, Monte Sano State Park, and playgrounds with their son.

As Aerojet Rocketdyne’s business expands, Emens said she’s excited about the future and her place in it.

“I look forward to the new work and the opportunity to work with a localized engineering team dedicated to designing products for the defense industry,” she said.

– Lucy Berry DeButy
BOCAR on Track

Manufacturing Plant to Open in Limestone County by 2020

Representatives from the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber recently visited one of BOCAR Group’s sites in Mexico. A representative from AIDT also went on the trip to see what happens at the plant in Saltillo, which will be similar to the operation built in Huntsville.

The Saltillo plant is under BOCAR Group’s Division AUMA, which develops and produces aluminum die-cast products along with aluminum gravity casting for vehicle engines, transmission and structural components. Several parts made at the Saltillo plant are shipped to the Mercedes-Benz plant in Vance, Alabama.

“It’s a highly technical facility, but their process also includes a lot of craftsmanship,” said Lucia Cape, the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber’s Senior VP of Economic Development. “Seeing the employees both in the training programs and on the plant floor helps you understand the level of quality on parts of a vehicle you might never see.”

Kevin Taylor, AIDT’s Assistant Director for Prospect Recruitment and Training, shared what AIDT can do to support the employment process in Huntsville. He also observed how the Saltillo manufacturing plant is set up so that when AIDT creates its training programs here, similar processes can be utilized while also maintaining the corporate integrity of the operations.

As of this writing, BOCAR Group was in the process of selecting a general contractor. The Huntsville plant will be built on Bibb Garrett Road just next to Interstate 65 in the Limestone County limits. Construction is scheduled to begin this spring and production should begin two years later. The plant will bring more than 300 new jobs to the area, adding to Alabama’s robust automotive manufacturing sector.

– Claire Aiello
Alabama kicked off 2018 in a big way. Our state was already in the national spotlight on January 8 when the Crimson Tide won its 17th National Championship with a miracle pass in overtime, beating the Georgia Bulldogs. And on January 10, the state landed another huge win, with Toyota-Mazda announcing it will build its first joint American manufacturing plant in Huntsville.
Alabama lands Toyota-Mazda plant and 4,000 jobs

This is a $1.6 billion investment that will bring 4,000 jobs to north Alabama, not to mention thousands more from new suppliers.

Governor Kay Ivey, Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle, and others welcomed the heads of Mazda and Toyota to make the joint announcement in Montgomery.

“The partnership between Toyota and Mazda will expand innovative automotive manufacturing in Alabama,” Governor Ivey said.

“Their decision to locate this new facility in Huntsville is a testament to the talented workforce in our state. We are proud that this partnership puts Alabama on the forefront of technology in this dynamic global industry.”

The new plant will cover the Huntsville mega site off Greenbrier Road, plus additional surrounding land. The groundbreaking is expected to take place later this year.

Once built, it will have the capacity to build 300,000 vehicles per year, with production split evenly between two lines. Mazda will produce a new crossover model for North American markets, and Toyota will make the Corolla.

The plant will come online just as Mazda begins its second century of operation.

“Mazda makes cars with a clear vision of how we want to inspire people, contribute to society and help preserve the beauty of the earth,” said Masamichi Kogai, President and CEO of Mazda Motor Corporation. “By making such cars here in Alabama, we hope that over time our plant will come to occupy a special place in the hearts of our employees and the local community.”

“Our investment to establish a new vehicle assembly plant with Mazda builds on the very success we have enjoyed in Alabama, where we produce engines for the North American market,” said Akio Toyoda, President of Toyota Motor Corporation. “Starting from 2021, I’m confident that we will run a highly competitive plant by bringing together the expertise of Toyota and Mazda as well as the excellent Alabama workforce.”

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle hailed the Toyota-Mazda decision as a gamechanger.

“With this announcement, our world changes overnight,” Battle said. “Toyota and Mazda, two of the world’s most innovative automakers, have created a legacy project that will provide jobs for decades to come for Huntsville and Alabama. It vaults Alabama to the top as an industry leader in producing the next generation of cars that will power our nation.”

Alabama is the fifth largest producer of cars and light trucks nationally and stands at the

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center of the growing Southeastern automotive region with a strong automotive presence including Toyota’s engine plant in Huntsville. With more than 150 Tier 1 and 2 automotive suppliers in the state as well as automakers, there are approximately 57,000 automotive manufacturing jobs in Alabama.

“In a single generation, Alabama has become a powerhouse in the auto industry, and the Toyota-Mazda joint-venture manufacturing facility will provide another potent catalyst for sustained growth in the sector,” said Greg Canfield, secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce. “We expect the new facility in Huntsville to act as a magnet for substantial new industry investment and job-creation that lifts communities and families across the state,” he added.

“We are very excited to welcome Toyota-Mazda to our growing industrial family here in Limestone County,” said Limestone County Commission Chairman Mark Yarbrough. “We appreciate your confidence in our County and our workforce and are committed to your success.”

— Claire Aiello

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Something you may not know is that Alabama was the very first state where I stayed when I was a young boy. I was a Boy Scout at the time, and this was my first extended stay away from home, so I was a little nervous. But thanks to the famous Southern hospitality, my first experience in America was a success and remained quite special to me. I’m very proud to be back in Alabama today.

Mr. Akio Toyoda
President, Toyota Motor Corporation

Before the announcement on January 10, Gov. Ivey met privately with the leaders of Toyota and Mazda in her office along with Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle.

Mr. Kogai and Mr. Toyoda presented Gov. Ivey with models of a Mazda MX-5 and a Toyota Corolla. In return, Gov. Ivey presented them gift boxes containing cufflinks with the Governor’s seal.

Mayor Battle presented the two men with chocolates by Pizzelle’s Confections, truffles decorated with iHeartHSV and the State of Alabama.
The plant will cover the Huntsville mega site off Greenbrier Road, plus additional surrounding land.

Shovel-Ready

Beginning Stages Underway at Toyota-Mazda Plant Site

Site work is expected to begin soon at the Limestone County property where Toyota-Mazda will invest $1.6 billion on a joint venture automotive plant.

Shane Davis, Director of Urban and Economic Development for the City of Huntsville, said workers will remove existing structures and mass grade the 2,400-acre site off Powell and Greenbrier roads. Construction should start early next year with vehicles coming off the line by mid-2021.

The impact of the plant on Huntsville and the north Alabama region is expected to be significant, Davis said.

“I believe to fully realize the impact of the Toyota-Mazda facility will take 10 years,” he said. “Naturally, there will be an immediate impact with construction of the facility in regards to supplying materials and the thousands of jobs created during the construction phase.”

Davis said officials will consider multiple factors, including the direct impact from the manufacturer, suppliers, housing and business growth, and more.

The land where Toyota-Mazda will operate is the same property Volkswagen passed over almost a decade ago. In 2016, the tract was certified as a TVA Megasite, the same program that helped Chattanooga, Tenn., land Volkswagen’s first U.S. automotive plant over Huntsville.

To become a TVA Megasite, a property must have at least 1,000 contiguous acres and undergo environmental reviews. It must also have interstate access, potential for rail service, and utility capability to serve a major manufacturing company.

The Huntsville site near Polaris and GE Aviation was certified by McCallum Sweeney Consulting, a Greenville, S.C., company that provides site selection and incentive negotiation services. Officials used the new Major 21st Century Manufacturing Zone Act as an economic development tool to help finance the project.

Davis said the property has key features Toyota-Mazda couldn’t refuse: a shovel-ready site, lower overall costs, ample nearby utility services, and excellent logistics for highway, rail, and intermodal travel. It also has a “proven location [with] an educated workforce and a system in place that has always produced and trained the next generation of workers,” he said.

Designed to make 300,000 cars annually, the Toyota-Mazda plant will have dual assembly lines to create Corolla and Mazda crossover vehicles. The operation will have 4,000 workers at full production with an average salary of $50,000 and a payroll of at least $200 million.

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle said the city had a distinct advantage over others because of its strong relationship with Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama, an engine plant only 14 miles from the Toyota-Mazda site. Toyota and Mazda first announced their alliance in August 2017, a move the City of Huntsville described as a “milestone in the journey to further strengthen and accelerate the partnership in a sustainable way.”

Battle said both companies were impressed by the available land resources and the spirit of collaboration across the state to make the project happen.

“Everybody pulled their weight on this project and everyone was an integral part in making it become a reality,” he said. “I can’t say enough about the partnerships.”

– Lucy Berry DeButy
Laying the Foundation
Persistence Pays Off, and These Men Helped Prove It

Charlie Younger and W.F. Sanders are two men we see often around the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber. They are among the elder statesmen in Huntsville and have witnessed our city change direction and shape over the years. They’ve also played a role in those developments.

Both gentlemen are humble about it, though. They talk about Huntsville with a twinkle in their eye and credit our success to many people over the years who helped lay a strong foundation.

“It’s the inordinate number of people and leaders throughout the ages who were concerned about the character of the town,” said Younger. “Who were willing to work, unselfishly, in advancing our town.”

Younger was a Huntsville City Attorney for over 25 years and continues as counsel for various agencies, including the Industrial Development Board (IDB). Sanders works in wealth management and has for almost 60 years; he also serves on the IDB. The two were part of extensive negotiations to secure the land in Limestone County that would later be declared a TVA Megasite.

In a few years, that land, plus additional acreage, will be home to the bustling Toyota-Mazda automotive plant.

“A DANCE”

Over 70-plus years, the city and county have reserved sites for development, either through public or private acquisition. These areas include Redstone Arsenal, Cummings Research Park, Chase Industrial Park, and more.

In the 1980s, Huntsville began to eye land in Limestone County, east of Interstate 65 as an area ripe for future development.

“The city annexed massive amounts of undeveloped property in Limestone County based on petitions from owners,” Younger said. Based on this planning, those areas have water and sewer service available or nearby, ready to be piped in.

This annexation continued over the next 20 years. One large piece of the puzzle was farmland owned by Dr. Jack Sewell.

“We started a dance with Dr. Sewell, and it went on for quite some time,” said Sanders. “He had a 3,800-acre farm in Greenbrier. We were in the beginning stages of developing a lasting partnership with him – one that would positively impact hundreds of lives for years to come.”

Sanders and Younger were part of the group who talked with Dr. Sewell and his son, Banks Sewell, for several months, along with Mayor Tommy Battle, Dallas Fanning, and David Johnston.
“The question became how do you value the property? How much would you pay for the option? How long is the option? So that’s where I kind of led the charge for negotiating the terms of the option price,” said Johnston.

After a series of meetings that spanned several months, the City secured the option on 1,500 acres of the Sewell tract in 2009. Volkswagen had toured it the previous year, but it was not ready for development, and Huntsville lost the VW plant to Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Johnston said when Dr. Sewell agreed to the option, he sent a signal to other landowners that the area was a prime spot for future industry.

“We need major industrial zoning, we don’t need residential zoning. That option went a long way toward the Chamber, toward Huntsville having 20,000 acres of industrial development land out there instead of a bunch of little subdivisions. The Sewell option planted the image for it to be industrial,” said Johnston.

Each of the men said Dr. Sewell kept the process a pleasurable one because that’s what he learned growing up.

“Dr. Sewell said this was the way we always used to do business. He gave his word, we gave our word, and the documentation was minimal,” said Johnston. “Dr. Sewell said this is the way his father did business, and I really respected that. He was very conscientious of that.”

All of the men we spoke with noted the important role Dallas Fanning played in many projects, including this one.

“Dallas – I can’t say enough about what he did for this community,” Sanders added. “He worked under Mayor [Loretta] Spencer, he was invaluable to her, and the same thing to Tommy, and they both realized it. He could make things happen.”

**NEW GOAL: MEGASITE STATUS**

At that point, the city knew work must be done to make the land ripe for a deal in the future. In 2011, Huntsville quietly started working on the process to make the Sewell tract be certified a TVA Megasite.

To earn this status, a property must undergo environmental reviews. It must also have at least 1,000 contiguous acres, Interstate access, utility capability to serve a large manufacturing company, and potential for rail service.

Huntsville got the plan in motion, and on June 15, 2016, TVA President Bill Johnson declared the land a Megasite. He also challenged his team to secure a major project for the site very soon.

That happened. A year and a half later, Toyota-Mazda announced it had selected this property for its joint venture plant.

**21ST CENTURY TIF**

Huntsville is no stranger to the intricacies of large projects and how to support them. City leaders knew they needed some extra tools in the economic tool kit to go after Toyota-Mazda.

Mayor Battle worked with members of the Madison County Legislative Delegation to create a new mechanism for Huntsville and communities across the state to compete. Rep. Anthony Daniels introduced HB 311, and it was marshaled through the Senate by Sen. Arthur Orr. After approval of both chambers, it was put up to a vote of the people as Amendment 11. Mayor Battle visited cities across the state encouraging people to support it, and Alabama voters overwhelmingly approved it in 2016.

This created the 21st Century Manufacturing Zone Act, which gives local elected officials the authority to designate an area a 21st Century Manufacturing TIF Zone (Tax Increment Finance Zone). It also gives local governments authority to use the increment financing dollars in the district for the purposes of redevelopment or revitalization of property, acquisition of property, rehabilitation, or conservation; it also allows local governments to invest in infrastructure of roads, sewer, rail, and drainage improvements within the district. The local government, not the State, designates an area as a “TIF Zone”. The zone must be approved by County and City governments. Property tax revenues for schools and local governments in the “TIF Zone” are guaranteed to remain at current levels. The 21st Century Alabama Manufacturing Act essentially uses industrial investment as payment for improvements.

– Claire Aiello
Unique Skyline

Huntsville’s Rockets are Huge Recruiting Tools

Admit it – when you’re hosting visitors in Huntsville, whether they are family or business prospects – you make sure to drive by the U.S. Space & Rocket Center. The large rockets on Interstate 565 are some of our city’s best recruiting tools.

Dennis Cuneo was a Senior Vice President of Toyota and led the site search for the Toyota engine plant before it located here. He recalled passing through Huntsville on a vacation trip with his family.

“It was 2000, and we were driving down from Kentucky to New Orleans for Christmas vacation. It was Y2K, and I had to get back by New Years – at Toyota, we were concerned that our computers may go haywire. So, on my return trip, I was near Huntsville and took a side trip to scout it out. I saw the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, and I was really impressed with what I saw. I thought to myself, in the future, if we’re looking for a plant, this is a place we should keep in mind.”

Cuneo said he brought his team back, saw Cummings Research Park, our downtown area and other spots, and you know the rest of the story.

“The Huntsville engine plant was Toyota’s first deep South plant. Fifteen years ago, those of us who spent lots of time there may not have thought of Alabama this way, but it is now a major center of auto production. Mercedes put Alabama on the automotive map, and when we started our search for an engine plant, Huntsville was on our list. One thing led to another, and that’s where we ended up.”

Cuneo recalled many of the people he interacted with in the negotiating process: former County Commission Chairman Mike Gillespie, Senator Richard Shelby, Senator Jeff Sessions, Congressman Bud Cramer, former Mayor Loretta Spencer, and former Chamber President Brian Hilson, to name a few. Cuneo gives special credit to Dave Echols, with the Alabama Development Office, and his boss, Jim Hayes. Both have since passed away.

“I was very impressed with the teamwork between the city, state, county, and the Chamber,” Cuneo said. “The Chamber played a big role in the process, and as the plant was being built, Alabama officials at both the local and state level kept their commitments. Alabama’s training program, led by Ed Castile, provided critical training for the new workforce.”

He also recalled one moment that made him chuckle. “Someone had Kenny Stabler give me a call after they learned I was a sports fan.” Cuneo says he roots for Alabama now, as well as Penn State, and attended this year’s Sugar Bowl, where the Tide beat Clemson.

Cuneo has been back to Alabama several times, including speaking engagements in Montgomery and Birmingham. He’s also visited Huntsville on several occasions with prospects looking for a new plant site.

“Toyota has had a lot of success with the Huntsville engine plant, and I think that played a big role with the new plant locating there. The engine plant has expanded several times,” said Cuneo.

He now heads his own consulting firm. “I always have Huntsville on my list for any large, sophisticated project. It’s just a great town.”

– Claire Aiello
BRAC Blueprint

Past Preparation Helped Refine the Process of Cooperation

Landing the Toyota-Mazda plant is a prime example of regional cooperation at its best—and how progressive leaders learn and adapt from the past.

Joe Ritch remembers when Decatur and Huntsville fought a bitter battle for the Chrysler plant in the early 1980s.

“I had recently graduated from law school, but I remember seeing that and thinking it looked like children fighting…and I thought at the time, who cares which side of the line it goes on because everyone is going to benefit from it.”

Today, Ritch’s way of thinking is the norm, and it sets Huntsville and the Tennessee Valley apart and has other areas wondering how it works.

“I like to remind people that 50 miles above the Earth, you can’t see any city or county lines,” he says. “Our communities now know that when one succeeds, we all succeed. It’s not that complicated.”

Ritch, a Huntsville attorney, has played an instrumental role in creating the existing climate of political, business, and community cooperation for the greater good of the region. It started when he was tapped to participate on a task force to protect Redstone Arsenal and keep its jobs secure in preparation for the 1995 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC).

The refined process in place for BRAC today is worlds away from its initial beginnings. Ritch, longtime chairman of the group, says when BRACs in the early 1990s came up, there was no joint community approach, and the employee recruiting process essentially pitted communities against each other just as it had with the Chrysler plant.

“One of the first things we did in preparing for 1995 was change the name to Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee so it was more inclusive,” Ritch said. “We always knew Madison and Madison County would be involved, but this allowed us to reach others with the premise that Redstone Arsenal is a shared national treasure not owned by any single community.”

Today, the committee includes involvement by Decatur, Morgan County, Athens, Limestone County, Moulton, Lawrence County, Guntersville, Marshall County, Scottsboro, and Jackson County. Even Lincoln County and Fayetteville in Tennessee were among the first to participate. Florence, the Shoals area, and the small town of Grant have since become involved.

“Our focus is not about one community or one entity,” he says.

Then there’s the autonomous committee itself.

“When we recruit employees we are very protective of each other, Ritch says. For example, in the recruiting process if someone tells us they want to live by a lake, we send them to Guntersville or Scottsboro. If they want mountains, we send them to Tennessee communities.”

In August 2017, Gov. Kay Ivey cut the ribbon on Redstone Arsenal’s recently relocated Gate 9. She also presented a check in the amount of $1.3 million to help defray the cost of the $12.9 million project.
“New World” Project

Predicted $5.3 Billion Economic Impact During First Five Years

Economic development projects are often given code names to maintain confidentiality for prospective companies as they seek locations to expand their operations. The latest high-profile, major expansion was referred to by industrial recruiters by the code name, “New World”.

As we know today, “New World” was the January announcement of the Toyota-Mazda partnership with thousands of new, direct jobs and an annual payroll that reaches into nine figures. The location is Huntsville-annexed land in sprawling east Limestone County. That area certainly will be considered a new world when construction begins on the plant and automobiles start rolling off the assembly line in 2021.

**DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT FROM THE PLANT INCLUDES:**

- $1.6 billion investment by Toyota-Mazda.
- Employment at the plant will be 4,000.
- Average annual wage of these jobs is estimated at $50,000.
- Annual payroll of the plant will quickly reach $200 million.
- The Toyota-Mazda plant will generate a total of $1.5 billion in labor income during the first five years.
- Construction of the plant will employ thousands of workers.
- Equipment for the plant will require more installation jobs as the plant is completed.
- The construction of roads, rail, and utility infrastructure will add even more workers to bring the plant online.

As large as those numbers may appear, the total economic impact of this operation is staggering. Researchers at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) have put the total economic impact at $5.3 billion for the first five years, 2018-2022.

Four thousand direct jobs account for $4.1 billion in total impact. Multiplier jobs are 12,000 (including construction) and a figure of $1.2 billion. For the first five years, there will be 16,000 jobs created, and the total economic impact is estimated at more than $5 billion. The UAH researchers predict potential future growth in 10 years to be 25,000 jobs.

“The magnitude of this joint project with Toyota-Mazda is astonishing in its economic scope,” said Ray Vaughn, Vice President for Research and Economic Development at The University of Alabama in Huntsville. “But this venture appears that it will have a lasting, long-term impact on the global automobile manufacturing industry.

UAH looks forward to working closely with Toyota and Mazda to create solutions to some of the research and technical needs they may have,” Vaughn added.

The researchers viewed the development patterns of other Alabama auto assembly plants as part of their study.

**THOSE PATTERNS LED THEM TO THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:**

- Employees will likely be hired from across north Alabama and southern Tennessee with a majority from the Limestone, Madison, and Morgan counties region.
- Many of the employees may come to the plant directly from colleges, universities, and technical schools.
- There will be several job levels including administration, research, executives, and line workers.
- Some employees of the plant and the suppliers will relocate to the area and will buy houses, furniture, utilities, etc.
- New retail and service businesses will likely be opened in the area to conveniently meet the needs of plant employees, supplier employees, and their families. These may include food, personal services, professional services, etc., ... even lawn care.
- An undetermined number of suppliers to the plant are likely to build and open plants nearby.
- Transportation and logistics providers will likely establish freight centers for both inbound and outbound freight.
- The supplier locations and expansions will likely continue for several years into the future.

UAH economist Brinda Mahalingam and research scientist Jeff Thompson note that the plant’s economic impact will occur over many years, and for the sake of this study, the timeframe was impact from plant startup to build-out of the supplier network.

**IMPACT FROM PLANT STARTUP:**

- The plant and infrastructure improvements will require major construction projects and installation of major equipment.
- Employees will need to be hired and trained before the first car is made.
- Employees of the plant and suppliers will be hired over several months and maybe years.
First autos to roll off the assembly line are planned to be 2021 models.

A 5-year period is assumed to be necessary to fully start and smooth operations, 2018-2022.

**IMPACTS FROM BUILD-OUT OF THE SUPPLIER NETWORK:**

- Suppliers will begin to set up operations in time to support the plant startup.
- More suppliers are likely to locate or expand their local presence for several years after 2022.
- Logistics capacities will likely grow as more suppliers establish a local presence.

Total economic impacts will be unknown until the plant is operational and the supplier network established, according to Mahalingam and Thompson.

- The model used to estimate the economic impact for 2018-2022 is based on existing local business patterns in 2016.
- Estimated impact on Gross State Product (GSP) and the regional economy is calculated based on starting with what the current economy can produce.
- As the automotive sector becomes a larger share of the regional economy, the impact is likely to grow as well.
- The model that generated the output summary is based on only a five-year snapshot of the plant startup.
- Impacts are shown in terms of jobs and output dollars.
- Direct impacts are those directly involved with the plant.
- Multiplier jobs are those created by suppliers plus the retail, service, other jobs created to support the plant and supplier employees.
- The Alabama Department of Labor data suggests that the average number of multiplier jobs created for each direct job is approximately 2.68 jobs or stated as a multiplier of 3.68.

— Ray Garner
The University of Alabama in Huntsville
Gearing Up

**Huntsville Auto Suppliers Preparing for More Business**

Auto suppliers contribute daily to Alabama’s success in the manufacturing sector. They can feel proud when they see the slogan, “Made in Alabama” because they are part of it, too.

“Building strong supplier relationships has been a critical component to the success of Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama,” says David Fernandez, Toyota Alabama president. “We consider our suppliers part of our team, because without them, we could not produce the engines that supply one third of the Toyota vehicles built in North America.”

Now that the Toyota-Mazda plant is scheduled for 2021 operation in Huntsville, auto suppliers are gearing up for increased production.

**MITCHELL PLASTICS**

“The announcement that Toyota-Mazda will locate their new joint venture operation in Huntsville is great news,” says Joe D’Angelo, Mitchell’s chief executive officer. “We have been operating in Huntsville since 2005 but have never been able to fully utilize our plant capacity and the capability of the great team we have in Huntsville.”

Mitchell Plastics is a leading direct components supplier of automotive interior mechanisms and decorative components to original equipment manufacturers.

The company has 2,400 employees and seven manufacturing operations in North America, with its Huntsville plant currently employing 135 people.

“We are confident that this new plant – only minutes from our facility – will help us grow our operation and may even require us to expand our current footprint,” D’Angelo says.

**PENSKE**

Once the different vehicle components are manufactured, it takes a variety of logistics specialists to get the parts to the original equipment manufacturer – like Toyota.

“Penske and Toyota have a longstanding, valued relationship internationally and locally across our businesses,” said Marc Althen, President of Penske Logistics. “We look forward to the opportunity to serve Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama and to grow with the addition of the new joint venture at the Toyota-Mazda plant.”

At the Toyota plant in Huntsville, Cole Olive is the operations manager for Penske Logistics, just one of multiple logistics veins feeding the production lines.

Olive says the company has 64 employees running 46 daily routes totaling 31,000 miles – per day. These include trips to and from Scottsboro, east Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, and Missouri.

“Penske Logistics manages the inbound and outbound deliveries of overseas containers to the plant,” he says. “That includes deliveries and returns to suppliers.”

Olive says other companies also handle overseas and rail shipments to the plant.

“We also have three drivers who work in the delivery yard each day, on each shift, and they are constantly moving stocked trailers to and from the dock doors,” Olive says. “It’s a very busy place.”
BASF Corporation

Over the past 44 years, BASF in Huntsville has produced more than 400 million catalytic converters, a vehicle engine component that keeps harmful pollution out of the air. The Huntsville plant produces the active ingredients for the converters that treat the exhaust that comes out of engines.

In August 2017, BASF completed an 18-month expansion of its Huntsville plant, at the same time it celebrated the 400 millionth catalytic converter rolling off its production line.

With the expansion, the Huntsville plant is seeking to grow the auto industry and continue creating emission control technologies.

“The Huntsville facility is our largest emissions catalyst manufacturing site in North America, and this expansion demonstrates our commitment to our business growth strategy,” says Ken Lane, president of BASF’s Catalyst Division.

“The additional capacity will meet the growing market demand and customer technology needs in the region.”

More than 650 employees work at the plant, which opened in 1974. The annual impact for this facility is about $45 million, and the company pays more than $1.6 million in local and state taxes.

– Wendy Reeves

BRAC Blueprint, continued from page 17

Ritch stresses that Tennessee Valley BRAC is about cooperation and its goal is for everybody to benefit equally with no one getting disproportionate gains.

“That’s how it works. We have an outstanding community and volunteer members, we share the same goals, and we’ve learned that we do better working together than we do apart,” he says. “Our chamber provides us facilities and support staff. They are critical to our efforts and success.”

TOYOTA-MAZDA

Tracing its origins to the BRAC committee, that level of regional cooperation helped Huntsville land the Toyota-Mazda plant.

“Having the TVA Megasite in place was crucial,” says Ritch, whose tenure as Chairman of the TVA Board of Directors ended in January 2017. “Major factors in our success included the site was ready, its location and accessibility to transportation, and the range of suppliers within a 130-mile radius.”

State and local leaders, and the Chamber pulled it all together, he says.

“It was remarkable teamwork.”

In recent years, Ritch has regularly spoken to other government and military communities around the U.S. that want to know how the Tennessee Valley area grows and maintains its cohesive relationships.

“Every time I speak, it keeps coming up about the difficulty of keeping communities working together,” he says.

He tells them maybe it’s because the BRAC committee is citizen driven, with “amazing volunteers” all with a vested interest in the area doing well.

“It’s the importance of our purpose and the quality of our volunteers. They are the reason for our regional success.”

Those include 1995 BRAC, 2005 BRAC, the general officers’ quarters, the $175 million BRAC school bill, and the improvements at the Arsenal’s Gate 9. He says for future BRAC or other Redstone opportunities, the Tennessee Valley region is ready.

“I’d like to say it’s me, but it’s not. It’s supportive community leaders and an unmatched Chamber. We set the goals as a group, and I get out of the way,” Ritch says. “It’s not always perfect. We’ve had our moments. But right now, we are ready for our next challenges, and they are coming at us almost daily.”

– Wendy Reeves

Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Madison County, the City of Madison and the Tennessee Valley Authority were recognized with the Army’s inaugural Community Partnership Award in December 2016.
Keep Up the Good Workforce!

Workforce is the primary driver in business location and expansion decisions. Having enough people with the right skills determines whether a community stays on a site selection list or not. It also affects existing industry expansion decisions and could cause a company to pack up and leave town altogether. Huntsville/Madison County has been on the receiving end of corporate decisions to follow the talent, and the Chamber is determined to keep up the good workforce!

Five years ago, Huntsville/Madison County was one of a handful of cities invited to compete for the Boeing 777x manufacturing facility and its 8,500 jobs. Unlike most economic development projects, this one played out in the media. News reports articulated the perceived pros and cons of each community, and some suggested the Huntsville metro area could not support a project of this size and skill set.

To prove to Boeing, and to ourselves, that we could support the project, the Chamber commissioned Deloitte to conduct an in-depth analysis of our workforce, specifically in aerospace and advanced manufacturing. Not only did it confirm we had the highest concentration of engineers in the nation and were among the top metros for levels of adult education, it showed we had significant concentrations of manufacturing talent in occupations specific to aerospace and advanced manufacturing – 10 times the national average in aerospace engineering and operations technicians, and 2 to 3 times the national average in a number of assembly and technician positions.

We asked Deloitte to evaluate our capacity for new jobs in the aerospace and advanced manufacturing sector, and in 2014 their estimate was 10,000 to 12,000 additional jobs through 2024 – or 1,000 to 1,200 per year – based on workforce development trends at the time. Since then we have announced more than 8,000 new jobs, many in those targeted sectors, so when we were presented with the opportunity of 4,000 jobs with the Toyota-Mazda project, we asked Deloitte to update the analysis.

The updated report shows a drop in aerospace engineering and operations technicians, down from 10 times to 6 times the national average, but an increase in the select engineering occupations associated with aerospace and advanced manufacturing, from 5 times to 6 times the national average. The analysis also shows that the Huntsville Metro has 4 times the national average in assemblers and fabricators.

On the education front, the new analysis looked at the percentage increase in labor force with a high school degree since 1990, and the Huntsville Metro has a 50 percent increase compared to less than 25 percent at the national level. And our population within a 60-minute drive time is more than 800,000.

Looking at our capacity for growth, Deloitte estimates we can support an additional 7,000 manufacturing jobs between now and 2022 – or 1,400 per year, a higher number than indicated in the 2014 analysis. Our population growth and the attractiveness of the community because of our strong economy and quality of life have helped us stay ahead of our job growth curve.

While these numbers are reassuring, we are not content with the status quo. The Chamber will be rolling out new initiatives this year to dramatically increase the alignment between the career choices of today’s students and the occupations our growing economy requires. Looking back, our workforce has been our greatest strength. Looking ahead, it is also our greatest opportunity!

– Lucia Cape

Huntsville’s metro area can sustain an additional 7,000 manufacturing jobs through 2022.

Source: Huntsville Comparative Labor Market Analysis, Deloitte Consulting, LLC © November 2017

*Location Quotient: concentration relative to state or national population.
Focused Education

Local Colleges to Help with Future Toyota-Mazda Needs

The excitement surrounding 4,000-plus new jobs coming to the Tennessee Valley is a gamechanger for area colleges, which are already ramping up programs to meet the demand for the 2021 opening of the new Toyota-Mazda plant.

“It is certainly going to step up the demand for careers in advanced manufacturing, and we are ready for that challenge,” says Calhoun Community College President Dr. James Klau-ber.

J.F. Drake State Community & Technical College, Alabama A&M University, and The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) are equally ready to help meet the workforce demands.

Interest in the new jobs kicked in immediately after the news came on January 10.

“We’ve been taking an enormous amount of phone calls since the announcement,” says John Holley, Dean of Technologies at Calhoun.

The calls are from potential students and alumni, says Kelli Morris, Director of Calhoun’s Career Services & Cooperative Learning.

“There’s lots of buzz about it, and it’s a great thing,” Morris says. “For the students, it depends on where they are in their current studies and where they want to be, but we are here to guide them to become employable overall in the community.”

J.F. DRAKE STATE COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE

In reaction to the Toyota-Mazda announcement, Drake State is already planning to expand its reach in programs such as advanced manufacturing and welding to its traditional, non-traditional, and dually enrolled high school students, says Christopher A. Lewis, Drake’s interim president.

“We will continue to offer a variety of programs and certificates, such as certified production technician certificates, to ensure that we can touch all levels of this community who desire to be prepared to work,” Lewis said.

Drake State has a workforce development initiative that provides non-credit, short-term courses tailored to enhance employability. Many of the programs lead to industry-recognized certification. Drake State can also customize training programs to suit the specific needs of employers and businesses, says Dr. Alice Raymond, acting Dean of Instruction.

She says non-credit program offerings include career technical fields like welding, electrical technology, soldering, and information technology certifications like Cisco Academy training and CompTIA certification.

Drake offers an advanced manufacturing degree program with tracks in injection molding, machine tool, mechatronics, welding, electrical technology, and engineering design.

“This program will directly link to the new plant employment opportunities,” Raymond says. “Of course any major plant will need office staff, computer and IT technicians, and our CIS and business program graduates will fit very well in that niche.

“If the plant includes a cafeteria, our culinary arts and hospitality management program will be able to provide the skill and talent toward that initiative. We have an HVAC and automotive services program that will provide highly trained graduates to that workforce.”

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**ALABAMA A&M UNIVERSITY**

“As the Tennessee Valley’s premier land grant institution of higher learning, Alabama A&M University is uniquely postured to provide the skills needed for its long-term success,” says Dr. Andrew Hugine Jr., the school’s president.

He says A&M is the state’s leading producer of minority science, technology, engineering, and mathematics majors.

“With such a significant economic venture as Toyota-Mazda, we are prepared for the demands to service its workforce well into the future,” Hugine says.

**UAH**

With a future expected to focus on electric vehicles, the UAH campus is ready to help Toyota-Mazda create a competitive edge by utilizing and building on more than 50 years of expertise in developing various modes of transportation, including exotic vehicles such as missiles and space hardware.

“The Toyota-Mazda partnership is a major opportunity for UAH researchers and students to be engaged in a new commercial enterprise that could very well transform the future of the automotive transportation industry,” said Ray Vaughn, UAH Vice President for Research and Economic Development. “UAH’s strengths lie in research and the application of that knowledge to real-world solutions. Talent on our campus could be a real asset for that partnership through our R&D activities as well as our advanced workforce development.”

Leading edge technologies include the core of the university’s academics and research: materials science; advanced energy storage and power systems; systems engineering; chemical engineering and electrical and computer engineering; as well as supply chain management and logistics and cybersecurity.

**CALHOUN COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Calhoun is home to the Alabama Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) Advanced Manufacturing Technician Program, just one vein of its workforce development programs (photo at left).

FAME includes a two-year technical associate’s degree that combines cutting-edge curriculum to support advanced manufacturing technology, paid working experience, along with learning highly sought-after business principles and best practices of a world-class manufacturer.

“FAME is a partnership between manufacturing sponsors in our area, and we accept 15 to 20 students each year,” says Kelli Morris.

Morris is also focusing on expanding co-op and apprenticeship opportunities to build skills of the current workforce because of varied interests of students.

John Holley says the Toyota-Mazda plant jobs will touch every traditional program Calhoun offers – from welding and robotics to computer information systems.

“We are constantly looking at what we need to do as far as expanding our offerings,” Holley says. “We are having 100 percent placement, and that tells me we have to look at the projections and forecasting data for the region because we’re already struggling to meet the need.”

Dr. Klauber is confident the FAME and co-op programs will help align the needs of area employers with students interested in careers in their chosen field.

“We already have great relationships with the school districts we serve, and with our dual credit offerings, we can help students get ready for careers at the manufacturing plants across our region, including Toyota-Mazda,” Klauber says. “It is an exciting time.”

– Wendy Reeves
AIDT

Alabama’s One Stop for Workforce Training

You often hear about AIDT when a company announces it is coming to Alabama. AIDT is Alabama’s workforce training program, and is the state’s clearinghouse to help recruit, screen, select, assess, and prepare workers for the jobs to be filled.

AIDT is a division of the Alabama Department of Commerce, and you can think of it this way: AIDT provides on-the-spot training even before you have a place to provide on-the-job training.

IT’S ALL ABOUT TIMING

The first step in the process is for AIDT to meet with the company to develop a timeline of how quickly things will happen, and when. The training program is customized to fit the company’s needs and plan for when employees will be hired.

Kevin Taylor, AIDT’s Assistant Director for Prospect Recruitment and Training, explains what happens next.

“Once we develop the curriculum, we start the recruiting process,” said Taylor. “AIDT’s media department will develop a recruiting ad for the company and place it on AIDT’s website. AIDT’s recruiting page is linked to various media outlets, including Alabama JobLink, online job boards and social media. AIDT also assists with recruiting salaried and professional positions.”

People interested in working with AIDT partners usually complete an online training application for most hourly positions, then AIDT sends letters to candidates for interviews. During the interviews, the company selects who will proceed to the pre-employment training program.

AIDT then notifies candidates who are chosen. From that point, the candidate starts the pre-employment training program.

The first class is usually an orientation. Company representatives talk with candidates and provide detailed information, and it’s the trainee’s chance to learn if he or she wants to work for the company. A trainee can expect to learn the company’s history, plans for the future, expectations of the job, wages, benefits, and other details. The candidate can choose to proceed or withdraw.

There is no cost for this program, and it is usually held two to four nights per week over the course of three to five weeks, typically adding up to approximately 40 to 60 hours of training, depending on the content.

Classes are typically held at the company’s facility or at a location nearby.

“It gives employees an idea of their daily drive,” said Taylor. “We want workers to see what their drive will be like, or how long it will take to get to work.”

THE BIG QUESTION: WHEN WILL COMPANIES HIRE?

This is what many people want to know – when will Toyota-Mazda start hiring?

Not yet, Taylor explained. He urges people to be patient but to also monitor AIDT.edu/jobs and check the listings.

“Every pre-employment training program depends on the company’s hiring plan. It’s considered a ‘just-in-time’ type of hiring,” said Taylor. “AIDT looks at the company’s hiring plan and backs up their dates, so they can have people just in time for when the company needs them.”

People can be trained, then give two to three weeks’ notice to their current company after receiving a job offer.

“You don’t want to have a bunch of people waiting around, already trained, because they’ll find something else to do,” added Taylor.

In addition to pre-employment training, AIDT also offers forklift training, crane training, OSHA training, leadership development, and maintenance assessment. To receive AIDT’s continued on page 26
AIDT also offers an apprenticeship program, called Apprenticeship Alabama, launched in January 2017. This program offers tax credits to companies that hire qualified apprentices who receive classroom and on-the-job training. AIDT’s Apprenticeship Alabama staff will guide companies through the registration process through USDOL and ALDOL.

AIDT has about 150 employees statewide and is currently working with 126 companies in 36 counties. It has 12 locations, which include training centers at Mercedes in Vance, Honda in Lincoln, and at Hyundai in Hope Hull, south of Montgomery. It also has an Aviation Training Center at Airbus in Mobile.

Taylor says AIDT plans to build a training facility at the Toyota-Mazda plant once it is built.

ALABAMA ROBOTICS TECHNOLOGY PARK

AIDT also runs a specialized facility in Limestone County that offers state-of-the-art technology. The Robotics Technology Park, or RTP, was built in 2010 and offers specialized robotics and automation training to Alabama companies at no cost.

Companies register at alabamartp.org, choosing from various courses. A typical class holds six to ten people.

There are three different levels of robotic training at the RTP: Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced. Robotic Electrical, Mechanical, Off Line Programming, and Welding classes are also offered, and RTP will soon offer classes for paint/dispense robotics.

In addition, RTP offers three levels of PLC (Programmable Logic Controllers) training for Allen Bradley, Omron, and Siemens PLCs.

Safety classes for Fork Lift, Overhead Crane, OSHA 10 and 30, and Arc Flash 70E are also taught at the RTP.

On the day we visited in February, Joshua McNatt and Jeremy Nix of Mitchell Plastics in Huntsville were attending a robotics class taught by Patrick Witt.

McNatt said he had heard about RTP and wanted to check it out for himself. “It’s pretty good,” he said. “I have a lot of [workers] who want to come down for the training.”

All of the robots in the RTP are used in industry, from large to small. The size of the robot determines the task it can perform. In many cases, companies have donated the robots so employees can train on the same brand they will use once they’re back at work. Other robotic vendors have equipment in the facility on consignment.

INSPIRING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

With such a large focus on robotics in K-12 education, middle and high school students can also get the opportunity to see the machines in action.

RTP participates in career fairs all over the state by taking the RTP Mobile Training Lab to show students about automation. Schools can also request tours of the RTP facility.

– Claire Aiello
New Law Authorizes Counties to Abate Ad Valorem Taxes

On February 6, Governor Kay Ivey signed Senate Bill 98 into law. The bill authorizes counties to abate ad valorem taxes for certain projects that qualify for incentives under the Alabama Jobs Act.

The new law allows counties to abate the increased taxes due when property is reclassified as “industrial property” such as the Toyota-Mazda property located in Limestone County.

“Alabama is a business-friendly state, and this bill is further proof that we want companies who chose Alabama to thrive,” Governor Ivey said. “I am proud of the hard work that went into bringing Toyota and Mazda’s $1.6 billion investment and 4,000 new jobs to Alabama. Bringing the Toyota-Mazda plant to Alabama is a testament to our state’s leadership and to the high quality of our workforce.”

Here’s how it breaks down. Under Alabama’s current use law, property being used as farmland is taxed as farmland. However, when you convert that property to industrial use, not only do you pay more in taxes on the property going forward, you must also pay for the last three years at the higher industrial rate. In essence, the tax ‘rolls back’.

This new law allows local governments to have the option of waiving the rollback tax if they choose.

The problem first came to light following the Polaris development project and resulted in a $500,000 bill. It has since been paid, but the new law clears up this item for future economic development projects.

The Huntsville/Madison County Chamber (HMCC) developed this legislation in concert with the Alabama Department of Commerce and other economic development interests in the state. Senator Arthur Orr sponsored SB98.

“I appreciate Governor Ivey signing SB 98 and for her constant efforts in leading our team, along with Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield, to land the Toyota-Mazda project,” Sen. Orr said. “Economic development takes everyone, and I am proud of the working relationship between the Governor’s Office and the Legislature which brought about these new jobs for the Tennessee Valley.”

“The Toyota-Mazda plant is one of the largest economic development projects in our state’s history,” said Rep. Danny Crawford, who sponsored the corresponding House Bill 173 along with Madison County’s House members. “This bill ensures that local governments can live up to the commitments they made to attract this important venture.”

The Huntsville/Madison County Chamber is grateful for the legislature’s quick action.

“The ability to waive rollback taxes places us in a more competitive position,” said Chip Cherry, HMCC President & CEO. “The Department of Commerce has taken the lead in assessing Alabama’s competitive position and crafting legislation that ensures we remain competitive in the future. In the case of SB98, Mayor Battle and Chairman Yarbrough made the case for the legislation, which was championed by Senator Orr and Representative Crawford. We are grateful to our legislative delegation, the Department of Commerce, and the Governor’s Office for securing approval of the SB98.”

– Claire Aiello

L-R: Rep. Danny Crawford (R), Limestone County; Gov. Kay Ivey; and Sen. Arthur Orr (R), Limestone, Madison, Morgan counties
Governor Ivey: Toyota-Mazda chose Alabama because of our workforce

The Toyota-Mazda plant will bring thousands of new jobs to north Alabama in the coming years. Governor Kay Ivey said state and local leaders didn't hesitate to go after the deal.

“Toyota-Mazda announced last year that the new facility they planned to build would mean a $1.6 billion investment and bring in 4,000 direct jobs and countless indirect jobs to the state chosen, so how could we not compete for it?” said Gov. Ivey. “We knew from the beginning that the Toyota-Mazda project would affect the state in a variety of good ways. This was a statewide project that will ultimately have impacts all across Alabama.”

Some negotiations are tougher than others, and this one brought some challenges. However, Ivey said she was confident Alabama would be victorious.

“Issues come along during every economic development project, but we knew we would be successful because of the great team we had working on this, from Secretary of Commerce Greg Canfield to the local officials in Huntsville and Limestone County,” said Gov. Ivey. “Everyone worked tirelessly to show Toyota-Mazda leaders that Alabama would be a successful new home.”

The governor credits Alabama’s people as the deciding factor, saying the company took notice of our state’s strength in recruiting and training employees.

“I truly believe the reason that Toyota-Mazda chose Alabama instead of North Carolina is because of our excellent workforce,” said Gov. Ivey. “Part of the project proposal was a workforce development component, so when you have an excellent workforce and you’re working hard to prepare your people for the jobs of tomorrow, company officials are going to be impressed. Our state also has a proven track record of being successful in the automotive industry and we have a very strong network of suppliers here, so I think all of these factors played important roles in the final decision.”

Mayor Tommy Battle: We landed Toyota-Mazda because our region speaks with one voice

After every big economic win in Huntsville, Mayor Tommy Battle follows Nick Saban’s 24-hour rule.

“The Crimson Tide coach gives players 24 hours to celebrate before it’s time to get back to work. That’s how Battle felt after learning Toyota-Mazda would open a $1.6 billion automotive plant in Huntsville.

“My initial reaction after receiving word was there’s still a lot of work to be done,” he said. “Every one of these we’ve done in the past 10 years — you know, the announcement is great, but right after the announcement is when the real hard work begins.”

Toyota-Mazda will operate off Powell Road in Huntsville-annexed Limestone County 14 miles from Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama’s engine plant. The property was passed over by Volkswagen almost a decade ago but was certified as a TVA Megasite in 2016 to be more competitive.

While most projects the size of Toyota-Mazda take 18-24 months to complete, Battle said this one took less than half a year partly because the site was shovel ready. The area’s strong workforce also played a key role in securing the development.

Toyota-Mazda will create 4,000 jobs and generate an annual payroll of at least $200 million. The facility will have the capacity to make 300,000 cars at least $200 million. The facility will have the capacity to make 300,000 cars each year with dual assembly lines for Corolla and Mazda crossover vehicles.

Mayor Battle is grateful the region came together to make the project happen.

“Many communities can’t come together, can’t speak with one voice, can’t work toward a common goal,” he said. “This community can.”

Limestone County Chairman Mark Yarbrough credits importance of teamwork in landing jobs & industry

North Alabama has been on a roll in recent months landing new business. Mark Yarbrough, Chairman of the Limestone County Commission, says you don’t have to scratch your head to figure out why.

“Simply, teamwork,” Yarbrough said without hesitation. “We are so fortunate to have the team that we have that works so well together towards what is best for our area.”

The different cities and counties, utilities, rail and other partners moved quickly to land the Toyota-Mazda plant. It was a huge undertaking, one that would have taken much longer had many of the pieces not already been in place.

“The massive scale of the project that would normally have been an 18-month process was condensed to five months,” said Yarbrough. “However, our team rolled up our sleeves, went to work and landed the deal.”

One thing made it much easier.

“The fact that the same process that landed GE Aviation, BOCAR and Polaris was already in place,” he added. Limestone County is now busy preparing for new growth.

“I get daily phone calls and emails from construction and consulting firms, etc., from all over the country,” said Yarbrough. “We are working with our partners to make sure that all of the deadlines are met both for infrastructure and workforce development as we prepare for the tremendous growth that is to come.”

What’s the secret? Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle has alluded to Yarbrough having a lucky rabbit’s foot.

“We have never lost a project that we have worked on together,” Yarbrough said. He says he doesn’t really carry a good luck token. Imagine the possibilities if he did.

Claire Aiello

– Claire Aiello

Lucy Berry DeButy

– Lucy Berry DeButy

– Claire Aiello

– Lucy Berry DeButy

– Claire Aiello
Q&A with **Greg Canfield**, Alabama Secretary of Commerce

Greg Canfield was appointed as head of the Department of Commerce in 2011. Prior to this, he served in the Alabama House of Representatives.

**WHY WAS THIS DEAL WORTH GOING AFTER?**

Over the years, Alabama has been fortunate to secure economic development projects that I would describe as transformational. These projects only come around every few years. They’re the kind of projects that would win you a National Championship if there were such a thing in economic development. They’re projects that change the trajectory of communities and the entire state.

Obviously, the Toyota-Mazda project fit that bill. Its magnitude is hard to overstate – $1.6 billion in capital investment, 4,000 high-paying jobs. Clearly, the auto assembly plant itself will attract a significant number of suppliers, magnifying the investment and job totals. Overall, the economic impact of the Toyota-Mazda manufacturing facility is going to be massive.

Also, the Toyota-Mazda assembly plant located in Alabama would serve to reinforce the state’s importance in this global industry. In a generation, Alabama has gone from producing no vehicles to rank as the No. 5 auto-producing state in the nation. Toyota-Mazda is going to propel us higher in those rankings.

It’s also worth noting that the development of electric vehicles is a key element of the joint venture between Toyota and Mazda. In the future, it’s certainly possible that the partnership’s Alabama plant will be involved in the production of advanced electric vehicles. No question about it, we’d like to see that.

**WHAT HELPED YOU KNOW IT WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL, DESPITE ROADBLOCKS THAT POPPED UP?**

I had confidence in our bid for the Toyota-Mazda joint-venture plant for a number of reasons. First, we have built a trusting relationship with Toyota, whose engine plant in Huntsville is undergoing its fifth expansion. In other words, Toyota is familiar with all the advantages that we can offer. That’s important to corporate decision-makers with a major investment on the line.

Another reason I felt good about our chances in the Toyota-Mazda competition is the overall quality of the state’s workforce, complemented by our excellent job training programs led by AIDT. To put it simply, workers in Alabama have proved they can build vehicles that are in demand around the world. ‘Made in Alabama’ is a point of pride for these workers, not just a slogan.

In addition, Alabama is known for having a pro-business, low-cost environment that allows all kinds of manufacturers to succeed and thrive. That reputation gives us a leg up when we’re competing for large-scale projects. We also have a track record of working together as a team to provide the critical support needed by companies to expand their operations over the years.

And while we put together a competitive incentive package for this project, I knew that incentives would never be the sole reason Toyota-Mazda’s team would select a site for an investment totaling $1.6 billion. That’s where all our other advantages came into play.

**WHAT MAKES ALABAMA ATTRACTION TO COMPANIES LIKE TOYOTA-MAZDA?**

The bottom line is that manufacturers from around the globe continue to find a welcoming home in Alabama. In the last five years alone, more than $9 billion in foreign direct investment has poured into the state, bringing more than 15,000 jobs. Most of that FDI has been in manufacturing, particularly in the automotive sector.

Mercedes-Benz’s success in Alabama has served to build a foundation for future foreign investment in the state. In a sense, it paved a way for other global manufacturers to follow: Honda, Hyundai, Toyota, Airbus, Austal, and many others. All these companies have discovered they can assemble a high-performing workforce, build world-class products, and thrive in Alabama.

It’s worth repeating: The bedrock of our success with global manufacturing companies has been the talented workers these companies have found in Alabama.

In addition, we’re refocusing our energies in Alabama to make sure the education community is an integral part of our workforce development efforts. Governor Kay Ivey has rolled out a number of initiatives with this in mind, including the “Strong Start-Strong Finish” collaborative approach that seeks to improve education from Pre-K to the workforce. These initiatives also aim to address the education-attainment gap through new programs that equip citizens with the skills and education needed to fill high-demand jobs.

**WHAT MAKES ALABAMA ATTRACTIVE TO COMPANIES LIKE TOYOTA-MAZDA?**

At the end of the day, economic development is about supporting a cause.

It’s about improving quality of life in the Tennessee Valley and giving people an opportunity for success, according to TVA Senior Vice President of Economic Development John Bradley.

“It is truly an honor to be involved in a cause that matters,” he said, speaking of the Toyota-Mazda project. “It doesn’t get any better than that.”

TVA Economic Development works in partnership with local power companies and economic development groups to attract new business and investment in the Valley. The organization also partners with existing industry to help foster economic growth.

TVA and Athens Utilities serve as the points of contact for all power needs related to the Toyota-Mazda joint venture. Bradley said TVA provided site selection and helicopter services, transmission planning, contracts, and economic development to facilitate the one-of-a-kind project.

**TVA Senior VP John Bradley sees economic development as a team sport**

“The Toyota-Mazda plant also landed on a TVA-certified Megasite, a program created by TVA in partnership with McCallum Sweeney Consulting to help identify and prepare sites for large-scale projects,” he said. “Economic development really is a team sport, particularly in a project of this magnitude.”

Creating jobs is fundamental to TVA’s mission of service. At its core, Bradley said TVA is here to serve and make life better for local residents.

“The impact of the Toyota-Mazda plant, bringing 4,000 new jobs to the area, will have a lasting impact in sustaining the quality of life for this region,” he said.

– Lucy Berry DeButy
Chairman Dale Strong: Landing Toyota-Mazda is proof teamwork and partnerships matter

Dale Strong has had a front row seat to many of Madison County’s largest development deals, and the Toyota-Mazda joint venture manufacturing plant is one he’ll never forget.

The Madison County Commission Chairman said the $1.6 billion, 4,000-job operation in Huntsville-annexed Limestone County will affect more than just the local workforce.

“The Toyota-Mazda project will impact north Alabama for generations,” he said. “Many of the employees will live in Madison County, while even more will shop and spend dollars locally, stimulating our economy. Retail and commercial (also) will increase, along with residential home construction.”

The City of Huntsville and State of Alabama were the lead groups on the Toyota-Mazda deal, but Strong said the Madison County Commission and Huntsville/Madison County Chamber were also heavily involved in everything from negotiations with local land owners to financial commitments in the incentive package.

The new plant will sit about 14 miles from Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama, which produces four-cylinder, V-6 and V-8 engines for several Toyota models. Production is expected to begin by 2021.

Strong said the “greatest legacy we’re leaving is proof that teamwork and partnerships” matter as leadership works to grow the local economy. “Because of our proven advanced manufacturing workforce, low taxes and common accord with our Japanese partners, this is what has led to 4,000 new jobs,” he said.

— Lucy Berry DeButy

Madison Mayor Paul Finley planning ahead to address traffic, school needs related to Toyota-Mazda announcement

Mayor Paul Finley expects big changes in the City of Madison thanks to the $1.6 billion Toyota-Mazda partnership in Huntsville-annexed Limestone County.

Although Finley wasn’t as active as others in the recruitment of Toyota-Mazda, he stayed informed and offered infrastructure incentive money to help leaders close the deal.

“In addition, we had multiple discussions with the Chamber on Limestone County zoning and the areas we might be able to support as the manufacturing facility comes online,” he said.

When the plant begins production, the location of the facility on Madison’s western border will change local traffic patterns. Finley said the Madison community typically travels from their homes east toward Cummings Research Park and Redstone Arsenal and west back home in the afternoon.

Residents driving to Toyota-Mazda will travel in the opposite direction, a process that will not only create more traffic but different travel patterns. Finley also expects a jump in local school enrollment as more families move to Madison.

Finley said regional collaboration is critical as it defines the area’s direction and builds on its strengths for the future.

“We have accomplished this year after year, decade after decade, turning opportunity into jobs filled by folks like you and me,” he said. “We are very proud to be partners in economic growth in the Tennessee Valley community.”

— Lucy Berry DeButy

Athens to turn 200 this November; Mayor Ronnie Marks planning for more smart growth as Toyota-Mazda moves in

Just like Huntsville/Madison County, the City of Athens is experiencing unprecedented growth.

So it’s no surprise the community had a hand in the recent Toyota-Mazda deal set to bring 4,000 jobs to north Alabama. Because of Toyota-Mazda’s investment in Limestone County, Athens Mayor Ronnie Marks said the city will attract people looking for dependable jobs, quality schools, and family-friendly activities.

The joint venture will also increase local job diversity, grow the city’s population, and expand the community’s retail base in a major way.

“Sales tax makes up 40 percent of our revenue, so retail growth is a priority,” Marks said. “Athens is pursuing mixed-used development opportunities with retail, townhomes and apartments to address a need our city has for more retail and smaller upscale residential opportunities.”

Marks said Athens Utilities will work with the Tennessee Valley Authority to build a $55.5 million substation to service the plant, which will be Toyota’s 11th manufacturing facility in the U.S.

Every city must focus on four areas to grow: public safety, education, economic vitality, and quality of life. As he reflects on his involvement in the Toyota-Mazda project, Marks said his concern is not his legacy – but the legacy of Athens.

“We are turning 200 years old this November,” he said. “We need to make the right steps as a city for the next 200 years. The Toyota-Mazda project provides challenges, especially with growing your city in a smart way, but these challenges also provide our city chances to enhance these focus areas.”

— Lucy Berry DeButy

Huntsville Utilities CEO Wes Kelley: Utility service a big part of the equation to prepare Megasite

Work to certify the Toyota-Mazda site as a TVA Megasite didn’t happen overnight. It took several years to work through all of the different steps that are involved.

Part of the certification requires the area to have utility capability to serve a large manufacturing company. Huntsville Utilities joined the process as early as 2014.

“The availability of utility infrastructure is one of the most important components of a successful industrial site. We are proud to stand with the City, Chamber and others to support the growth and economic prosperity of our community,” said Huntsville Utilities CEO Wes Kelley. “As a local municipally-owned utility, we are focused exclusively on the needs of Huntsville and Madison County.”

Kelley emphasized the utility can handle the new demands and said work has already been done to ensure this.

“Our electric, natural gas, and water systems are robust and complex, and we are committed to making long-term investments for our community. We must be ready for growth; if we aren’t ready, no one else can move forward,” said Kelley. “We balance the need to work ahead of the curve and invest in system improvements with providing good value to our existing customers.”

— Claire Aiello
Meeting demand: Limestone County Water and Sewer Authority’s Daryl Williamson says the system is ready

There has been tremendous growth in eastern Limestone County in recent years. New companies and homes have been built and that’s created a much higher demand for water.

We spoke with Daryl Williamson, head of the Limestone County Water and Sewer Authority (LCWSA), to see what improvements have been made to the system.

“Since incorporation in 1980, LCWSA has experienced phenomenal growth. In 1985, LCWSA was billing 4,200 customers and currently billing over 21,000 customers,” said Williamson. “LCWSA has over 1,100 miles of water mains within Limestone County. LCWSA has capacity to meet water demand for the foreseeable future as a result of purchase agreements and production capabilities.”

What about supply? Is there enough water available around the plant site? Williamson says absolutely.

“A distribution system is critical to customer satisfaction for water utilities. Infrastructure which is not adequate can cause interruptions in service or create water quality problems,” he explained. “LCWSA has built a robust water distribution system in the booming portion of eastern Limestone County and is well positioned to deliver a quality product to meet the requests of the newly announced Toyota-Mazda plant.”

Williamson said as more growth happens, including with future suppliers, his agency has good working relationships with cities and other utilities to meet additional needs.

“LCWSA is proud to partner with the city of Huntsville and the surrounding utilities,” said Williamson. “LCWSA views our opportunity to serve as a means of creating a healthy economy for the North Alabama region.”

— Claire Aiello

Morgan County Chairman Ray Long: ‘Regionalism’ key in defining north Alabama’s growth

It’s a buzzword that has helped north Alabama position itself for growth. Morgan County Commission Chairman Ray Long said no single city or county can lure the big jobs — it must be a team effort.

“We’ve never hesitated to do this,” said Long. “Regionalism is where it’s gone, and we all have to be on the same page working together to draw the big plants in, and we know that.”

Long credits good partners throughout north Alabama. He said when everyone is in sync, companies notice.

“We know we have to be on the same team, and working together promoting north Alabama,” said Chairman Long. “That’s key to industries looking, to ensure the region is working together so they can pull a good workforce and have good cooperation from local governments.”

Long said it has been proven a few times already with Remington and Polaris, and now Toyota-Mazda. We asked him about his initial reaction when he learned our region was going after the automakers’ first joint American plant.

“I was very proud. I know it’s not just good for Huntsville, it’s good for all of north Alabama,” Long said. “We were very proud Huntsville was taking the lead to go after this, and we were really proud to be part of it.”

Morgan County supported the incentives package, understanding it was critical.

“To make sure that it happened. We didn’t want to leave just a few items that Huntsville needed to lure the project in. If we had any chance of making it a success, we wanted to be there,” Long said. “It was a no-brainer for us. Morgan County is just across the river from where the jobs are going to be located, but whether we get those jobs or not, we’re hoping for some spinoff jobs too.”

In terms of the main plant, plus spinoff and supplier jobs, Long predicts those will add up to 10,000 positions in the coming years.

“To see it bringing our people jobs, for one thing, and I see us getting a lot of new residents in Morgan County and the City of Decatur,” Long said. “When you count the suppliers and Toyota-Mazda, they’re not all going to live around the plant. Younger people will get those jobs and have money to build homes. We’re going to see residential growth, and when those people bring those checks across the river, that will mean sales taxes. For us, it’s just a big win.”

— Claire Aiello

Hundley Batts on Industrial Development Board’s role in recruiting companies

Born a few blocks from the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber, Hundley Batts says he’s an encyclopedia of the area’s largest economic wins.

The chair of the City of Huntsville’s Industrial Development Board is excited for what Toyota-Mazda will bring to the TVA Megasite off Powell Road in Limestone County.

“I think it will have a major impact providing 4,000 jobs,” he said. “I think it’s worthy. It’s a broad brush in my opinion for employment and for growth.”

Batts, who joined the board 30 years ago, served as vice chair for more than 10 years before becoming chairman. He said he reviews projects both small and large and does what he can to facilitate them.

The board works at least 40 projects at one time, he said. Although they don’t sign every company they recruit, Batts said they do whatever they can to try to bring them to Huntsville/Madison County.

With Toyota-Mazda, Batts said the long-term benefits are clear.

“When you get additional money coming into your town, it’s a blessing to that community to have that additional income,” he said.

— Lucy Berry DeButy
Alabama Speaker of the House Mac McCutcheon: Toyota-Mazda result of “a perfect plan of action”

Alabama House Speaker Mac McCutcheon, R-Monrovia, says one constant in Montgomery is work on legislation to promote opportunities to compete for industry and increase economic development.

“The Toyota-Mazda plant is a huge success story for North Alabama and the state as a whole,” he says. “It’s going to bring high-quality jobs and improve the overall quality of life for everyone in the area.”

McCutcheon says he co-sponsored the Alabama Jobs Act in 2015, which was a key step in creating dollars for incentive packages by giving cities access to state funds for things like site acquisition and infrastructure improvements.

“We need those dollars to be competitive,” he says. “I also carried a bill a couple of years ago, the Alabama Renewal Act, which was another economic jobs bill that allows economic developers … to create a pay-as-you-go incentive program so that we are accountable for taxpayers’ dollars given as incentives.”

Both acts, he says, have proven to be key elements over and over when it comes to recruiting a project like Toyota-Mazda.

“It’s a very competitive market out there that we have to compete in if we want to be successful in recruiting these type of industries,” McCutcheon says. “Many times local communities can only do so much, so the state needs to be a partner and help make these deals work.”

McCutcheon sees the Toyota-Mazda project as a result “of a perfect plan of action” put together by local governments from multiple counties and cities, chambers of commerce, local and state economic development teams, the Legislature and governor.

“It took all of us working together … and I’m very proud of it,” he says. “It’s not the first time we’ve had this kind of success with Madison County and North Alabama recruiting industry, and it’s paying big dividends for us.”

— Wendy Reeves

Norfolk Southern’s Daniel Parker stands ready to help with rail improvements

Industrial development projects in Alabama like the new Toyota-Mazda plant are Daniel Parker’s full-time responsibility at Norfolk Southern.

“Some projects are small and straightforward, and others – such as Toyota-Mazda – are very comprehensive,” says Parker, the company’s industrial development manager.

The process always starts with an initial correspondence, either from the state and/or participating cities and counties, wanting to know if Norfolk Southern could provide rail service for a project.

“After reviewing the information available on the Toyota-Mazda plant, I began working with our internal departments to determine the feasibility for rail service and then the potential access to the Greenbrier site,” Parker says. “For this project I acted as the liaison between Norfolk Southern and the State of Alabama and our Huntsville-area partners.”

He says the opportunity to work on an auto assembly project is always exciting.

“In this case working not only with Toyota but also with Mazda provides an opportunity for Norfolk Southern to meet the needs of two premier auto manufacturers.”

Parker considers himself fortunate to have an amazing family and an exciting career.

Based in Birmingham, Parker is the industrial development manager for Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. He says in 2017 Norfolk Southern facilitated more than $1 billion in industrial development along its rail lines.

“That investment by our customers represents 54 new and 21 expanded facilities,” Parker says. “The number of jobs added directly by these industries totals 1,979, and the indirect jobs many times more.”

The new Huntsville deal just adds to that success.

“The Toyota-Mazda facility will provide a great economic boost on the Huntsville area and the state of Alabama,” Parker says. “Additionally, the downstream effect of the Toyota-Mazda facility will provide growth opportunities beyond the automotive sector. We’re happy to welcome them to Alabama.”

— Wendy Reeves

Alabama Minority Leader Anthony Daniels: Our local economy is going to boom

There are times when elected leaders must put politics aside to benefit the communities they serve.

The recent Toyota-Mazda project was an example of that, Rep. Anthony Daniels said. As a sponsor of the Major 21st Century Manufacturing Zone Act legislation, Daniels said officials from all political spectrums came together to do what’s best for north Alabama and the region.

“Partisanship doesn’t really matter when we’re working on things that improve the quality of life and provide greater opportunities and growth for our community,” he said. “Our delegation prides itself on collaborating and working with each other. That’s how we’ve always been and that’s how we’ll continue to be.”

The Toyota-Mazda project was the first time the Major 21st Century Manufacturing Zone Act was used as an economic development tool in Alabama. A form of tax increment financing (TIF), the tool funds infrastructure improvements on projects worth at least $100 million on sites larger than 250 acres.

Daniels said the act laid the groundwork for Alabama to recruit major industry like the $1.6 billion Toyota-Mazda joint venture to its communities. He expects local colleges will double down on workforce development to meet the employment needs of new industry.

“It’s going to improve the quality of life in our community, it’s going to boost retail, and it’s really going to boost our housing market,” Daniels said. “Our local economy is going to boom.”

— Lucy Berry DeButy
Senator Richard Shelby: Alabama’s proven track record helped state land Toyota-Mazda

Senator Richard Shelby was first elected to the Senate in 1986, and he’s seen a lot change in our state since that time. He says the conversation amongst his colleagues is good to hear about Alabama.

“I am proud to be representing our great state in Washington during a time when we are experiencing heightened job growth and economic development,” said Sen. Shelby. “I look forward to seeing this growth continue to foster an environment that will attract opportunity and world-class employees to the state.”

Sen. Shelby said Alabama has proved it has an environment where manufacturing operations thrive, and that’s what led to us landing the Toyota-Mazda plant.

“The recent announcement regarding the new Toyota-Mazda facility speaks volumes about the capabilities and effectiveness of our state’s skilled workforce and highlights the continued truth that Alabama is open for business,” said Sen. Shelby. “The people of Huntsville and the surrounding areas have a unique ability to work together as a community, collaborating and forming successful partnerships. Along with this unified effort, Huntsville has a remarkably skilled workforce, fueled by advanced technology and innovative research institutions throughout the area.”

Shelby added workforce development is a challenge we must face in the coming years. He said we must continue improvements in grades Pre-K through 12, because it is essential in creating a highly skilled workforce and fostering economic development and opportunity throughout Alabama.

“While this takes time, it is imperative we invest in equipping Alabamians with the knowledge and skills to thrive,” he emphasized.

– Claire Aiello

Congressman Mo Brooks: Colleagues often ask “How did Alabama do it?”

Rep. Mo Brooks (R-Alabama Dist. 5) was elected to the United States Congress in 2010. He says he frequently hears from his Congressional colleagues about the Tennessee Valley’s strong economy.

“In particular, the compliments come from Congressional districts and states that lost jobs competitions with us. Polaris, Remington, Toyota-Mazda, ATF, FBI, and various other Redstone Arsenal and local employer expansions are well-known. Our competitors ask how we did it,” said Congressman Brooks. “I smile back and talk about our excellent quality of life, strong education base, and collective belief that making profits is a good thing, not a bad one as seems to be the attitude in so much of America.”

Brooks has lived in Huntsville since 1963 and when he returns home, you can often find him at local industry announcements and ribbon cuttings.

“I’m proud to stand side by side with business and community leaders to celebrate the Tennessee Valley’s success and economic growth. Some business leaders are new to me. Quite a few are Tennessee Valley natives I’ve known since childhood,” said the Congressman. “Many of the smaller businesses are home-grown Alabama companies started by local entrepreneurs who took a chance to pursue their dream and invest in their local community. And for the larger companies that build a plant or relocate to the Tennessee Valley, they selected north Alabama because they recognize it’s a great place for their employees to live and work. As much as anything, I want local, national, and foreign business leaders to know that our city, county, state, and federal leaders are committed to helping them be successful because, as they do well, the Tennessee Valley does well. And the word about our community spreads and leads to better and better things.”

– Claire Aiello

Alabama’s Junior Senator Doug Jones impressed by what he’s hearing about our State

Senator Doug Jones took the oath of office on January 3, 2018. The Toyota-Mazda deal was announced seven days later.

“We’re not going to draw any conclusions there, and neither did Jones, but you have to admit eyes were certainly on Alabama.

Sen. Jones said he likes what he’s hearing about our state.

“I think folks across the country have taken notice at our ability to successfully compete with other states to land big projects like Toyota-Mazda,” said Jones. “North Alabama, in particular, has been able to successfully show businesses looking to relocate that we have a welcoming climate for companies that combines tax incentives with a skilled workforce.”

Why were we successful in landing the deal? Sen. Jones says he thinks it was a combination of factors.

“Huntsville is a top destination for advanced manufacturing companies thanks in part to the skilled local workforce and because of our pro-business environment,” he said. “I also think my election sent a strong message to Toyota, Mazda, and job creators everywhere that Alabama is open and welcoming for opportunity.”

Sen. Jones said Huntsville’s recent winning streak is due in part to our city’s skilled workforce and track record of attracting top-tier businesses.

“Combine that with the City’s leadership, as well as the Chamber, and it’s clear that Huntsville can compete with any locality in the country for any company looking to grow,” said Sen. Jones.

– Claire Aiello
Major ED Projects: 2010 to Present

SUPPORTED BY THE HUNTSVILLE/MADISON COUNTY CHAMBER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS STAFF
Behind the Scenes
Chamber’s E.D. Team Works to Recruit and Land Projects

Why has the Huntsville-Madison County area been so successful in growing economically? Why have companies such as Toyota-Mazda, Remington, Polaris, and Blue Origin chosen to locate here with major projects?

Our region offers a top-class workforce in many different areas including military, space, biotechnology, and diversified manufacturing. We have a high quality of life, a favorable cost of living, and a supportive ecosystem for technology and manufacturing companies across industries.

And thanks to the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber Economic Development team, more and more companies are learning this for themselves.

“Our job is to support the decision-making process for new or expanding companies by providing the information they need and structuring a solution that meets their schedule and budget,” said Chip Cherry, the Chamber’s President and CEO and the senior economic developer on the team.

Lucia Cape heads the Economic Development, Industry Relations & Workforce Division, which includes Ken Smith, Will West, Erin Koshut, Jill Bruton, and Lydia Pennington. All work behind the scenes to bring new companies to the area while ensuring current businesses find ways and means to expand and thrive.

Another reason companies choose Huntsville is because of personal connections. These are built over months and even years of proactively marketing the community to targeted industries.

For example, the decision by Blue Origin to come here was made two years after Cape initially contacted the company, before a project was even initiated. During that time, she kept in contact with company officials—anywhere and just about everywhere, including other countries.

And, thanks in part to her persistence, the rocket engine maker is coming to Huntsville with a $200 million capital investment and nearly 350 jobs.

“Economic development relies on relationships and trust that are developed over time and through experience,” said Cape. “Site selectors and their clients have to know that a community will deliver on its promises.”

It’s also about being able to make quick changes and sometimes work on holidays to land a prospective company. Will West, the Chamber’s Project Manager, often has to juggle items “on the fly”. He is often the first point of contact between the Chamber and a new company.

“I work across different channels to pull together our community resources. And, at the same time, I’m learning everything I can about the company to anticipate its needs,” West said.

“He makes sure all the boxes are checked, logistics are arranged, and deadlines are met,” Cape said.

There are often interesting requests—such as when a delegation from Korea arrived late one night and wanted a familiar meal. Or when an aerospace executive wanted to drive by Dr. Wernher von Braun’s former home. Or when a Japanese journalist needed help finding the Toyota-Mazda plant site.

CUMMINGS RESEARCH PARK

A shining jewel of the Chamber—and the region—is Cummings Research Park (CRP). The 3,843-acre park is the second-largest in the country and fourth-largest in the world. It is home to some 300 companies with more than 26,000 employees.

As director of CRP, Erin Koshut’s sole focus is to support new and existing industry there.

“He makes sure all the boxes are checked, logistics are arranged, and deadlines are met,” Cape said. “If it’s not in the Park, she
hands it off to someone else on the team.”

“We focus on the companies who want to grow there and move there. We solely work on the companies’ needs,” said Koshut.

But she is also working to make CRP more than a place where people just go to work. Through the updated master planning that she led and unique programs targeted to CRP companies, the Park is being revitalized.

“We are working to create a sense of community and collaborative culture,” she said.

One of the ways to create that culture is through community get-togethers in the Park. Koshut said it actually took some work to get everyone on board about this concept, though.

“Companies initially didn’t want to participate,” she said. “They were afraid their employees would mingle too much and leave for competitors.”

But that hesitancy ended when company leaders saw morale go up and the spirit of community bloomed.

“Now there’s a change in attitude,” Koshut said.

More companies are now asking about building in the park or moving into the available buildings. In fact, Cummings Research Park’s occupancy rate is over 90 percent for the first time in several years.

“Erin is creating a buzz inside the Park,” West said. “The vacancy rate is starting to go down because of that.”

Koshut’s job includes managing the CRP Board and working with City officials.

Tenants in Cummings Research Park must follow specific zoning ordinances, and sometimes it may be necessary for the CRP Board to request variances.

“We work hand-in-hand with the city planning board,” Koshut said.

While the Park and the Huntsville-Madison County area are getting a lot of attention from new businesses, the Chamber team must still recruit and make it easy for companies to move here.

“Everybody has an individual role, but we work as a team,” said Ken Smith, the Chamber’s Director of Research and Information Services. He is responsible for making sure the Chamber has the data it needs to respond to requests for information and to promote the community.

“We do more than provide good information in a timely manner,” said Smith. “We understand our economy and are able to tell our story.”

MEMBERS INVEST IN CHAMBER’S SUCCESS

When considering an investment in a new community, many prospective companies want to talk to their peers to get information on business climate, workforce and other day-to-day experiences. The Chamber has 2,100 members to call on to share their success stories and serve as ambassadors for the Huntsville region. From personal stories of relocation to examples of challenges overcome with the Chamber’s help, business leaders play a big role in our continued growth.

A main source of financial support for economic development is the Huntsville Regional Economic Growth Initiative (HREGI). There are more than 130 HREGI investors who contribute funds in addition to their membership dues and sponsorships. They understand that a rising tide lifts all boats and that the Chamber is working to raise the water level for everyone.

“Everything we do to recruit new companies also helps our existing companies,” said Cape. “HREGI investors are willing to pay it forward.”

– Bud McLaughlin
Hockey, High-tech, and Huntsville: Where, Why, and How Our Community Competes

Huntsville is the Hockey Capital of the South, so it’s only appropriate to begin a column about ambitious community efforts with a quote from The Great One. Wayne Gretzky said, “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.”

As many now know, Huntsville was one of two cities in the state to submit a proposal to Amazon for their HQ2 location. You (and everyone else around the world) likely read the recent news of Amazon’s down-select for locations being considered for their HQ2, and Huntsville was not on the list of 20 finalists.

When we consider economic development projects for our community, we look at a number of factors. It’s not only about going after the ones we can win. It’s also about pursuing projects that can accelerate us. Amazon HQ2 was a stretch, but never one to shrink from a challenge – on Earth or in space – Huntsville went for it!

What we liked most about our chances wasn’t our size, even though our labor shed has 1.1 million people, so we met Amazon’s minimum requirement. It wasn’t our transportation options, despite our low commute time and robust plans for multi-modal transportation growth. It wasn’t even our fantastic workforce with the highest concentration of engineers in the U.S. and highly skilled technical talent across other occupations. And it wasn’t the fact that several Amazon companies have already selected the Rocket City (Curse, Whole Foods, Blue Origin). It was all of this, and more! Our arts, education and culture, our vibrant downtown, our miles of biking trails and acres of green space, our low cost of living, and most importantly, our legacy of innovation.

All was not lost on this Amazonian effort. As is often the case in these very large proposals, we learned some lessons and developed some opportunities for the future. We now have an even stronger community value proposition that speaks directly to new companies with large projects in diverse industries. This bolsters our competitive position as we engage with other prospects, and hey, we got in front of Amazon’s leadership team without breaking the bank!

The HQ2 proposal gave us a unique position to capitalize on the Chamber and City’s investment in the Cummings Research Park (CRP) master plan by featuring potential HQ2 sites within CRP and the quality of life investments planned as part of that concept. We were able to discuss the growing sense of community within the Park and the highly technical and world-class work being done by companies and their employees throughout our CRP community.

Our proposal also gave us the opportunity to show the strength of our research universities, community colleges, and K-12 systems. If you look at the high-tech cities we regularly compete against, a steady workforce pipeline anchored by a strong research university drives their growth. Huntsville has two PhD-granting research universities – The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) and Alabama A&M University – that generate high return on investment and industry experience for their students. Calhoun Community College is Alabama’s largest two-year college with a second campus near UAH in CRP. J.F. Drake State Community and Technical College provides an additional two-year option for students pursuing technical and associate degrees. And our three K-12 systems have high graduation rates, nationally recognized STEM programs, and rigorous Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate options.

Amazon told the world in its RFP what it values for its company and its employees, and we used this opportunity to benchmark ourselves against those values. We got the chance to share our strengths, and we took note of the areas that need some more work because we recognize that other forward-thinking companies like Amazon will have the same values. We think big here in Huntsville, and we’ll keep thinking big … because after all, we’ve changed the world … and we’re ready to do it again.

– Erin Koshut
Director
Cummings Research Park
Huntsville Regional Economic Growth Initiative

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