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ALL READY FOR ANOTHER WAVE OF JAPANESE INVESTMENT

For more than half a century, the Southern United States has attracted Japanese automakers and hundreds of other Japanese companies within the automotive supply chain, successfully drawing them in with a business-friendly environment and a consistent stream of reliable skilled workers. And with the seemingly unstoppable growth of the electric vehicle market, the Southern states are gearing up for the entry of more Japanese investment in the fast-growing sector. "Nissan has announced an additional \$500 million investment to convert its Canton, Mississippi, plant from a gasoline car factory to an EV factory, while Bridgestone announced an additional \$550 million investment in its Warren, Tennessee, plant," said **Japanese Consul-General in Nashville Yoichi Matsumoto**. Meanwhile, in Oklahoma, ranked No. 16 on Forbes' Best States to Do Business list in 2021, the expansion is also being observed in other industries and sectors, among them renewable energy. "By the consulate's count, there are currently 27 Japanese companies in Oklahoma. The big ones are Hitachi Computer Products, TDK and Weathernews Inc. Mitsubishi Heavy Industry also has Intercontinental Jet Services Corp., which maintains and refurbishes small airplanes in Tulsa," said **Japanese**

Consul-General of Japan in Houston Hirofumi Murabayashi, who oversees the Southern United States. The city of Ardmore has adopted a practical view when formulating its development plans. "There is a significant opportunity for companies who are looking to get into the green energy sector. We also believe that automotive parts represent another significant opportunity for our region, given again our proximity to production facilities in Texas and to newer investments in electric vehicles within the state of Oklahoma," said **Ardmore Development Authority President and CEO William Murphy**. While not traditionally a center of Japanese investment, Arkansas has stepped up its game to change that. The state's efforts appear to be working. In 2020, Arkansas ranked No. 7 in Site Selection Magazine's 2020 Governor's Cup for new and expanded business operations. "The city government, the businesses that are located here, the chamber of commerce and the school district are working together to make sure that we have highly qualified, motivated employees in the pipeline for whomever would like to locate here in Fort Smith," **City Administrator Carl Geffken** pointed out. Apart from the low cost of doing business, the Southern states also boast significant technical and intellectual credentials because

of several world-class research institutions and national laboratories in the region. "As Japanese companies look here, we line up our resources to meet their needs and introduce them to the right partners that can fulfill their business plans. One of the functions we do is a matchmaking or referral service for Japanese companies and American companies," said **David Rumbarger, president and CEO of Mississippi's Tupelo/Lee County Community Development Foundation**, a nonprofit that promotes economic growth in the state's northeast region. In Alabama, many cities and towns got a morale boost when Huntsville convinced Japanese car giants Mazda and Toyota to build their joint venture plant in the city. Likewise, the city of Opelika in central Alabama is confident it can attract Japanese companies because of various competitive advantages. "Opelika presents a very viable opportunity because of our ease of transportation, excellent schools and highly skilled workforce. Opelika is prepared to welcome Japanese investments in the pharmaceutical, bio, aerospace and advanced manufacturing sectors. Alabama is an extremely business-friendly state and the city of Opelika is fully committed to making sure our companies grow and succeed," said **Opelika Economic Development Director Lori Huguley**. ■

OPELIKA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: WELL-PREPARED FOR INVESTMENT

Located just 75 minutes from the Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport and accessible by an interstate highway, the city of Opelika in neighboring Alabama has become a much talked about investment center in the United States.



"Opelika presents itself as a viable location for business because of the ease of transportation, the educational partners that we have and the city's preparedness to welcome investment from Japan and elsewhere. Pharmaceuticals, bioindustries, aerospace and advanced manufacturing companies already find Opelika to be a great location," said **Opelika Economic Development Director Lori Huguley, CECD**. Various companies have chosen to build in or locate to the Northeast Opelika Industrial Park, a 2,400-acre (971-hectare) master-planned development along the western boundary of I-85. With an interstate interchange built specifically for large truck traffic and great connectivity throughout the Southern United States, the Northeast Opelika Industrial Park provides distinct logistical advantages. Over the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city attracted more than \$70 million worth of investment in the community. Two years later, there are no signs of a slowdown, with additional investments totaling over \$330 million. Among its recent achievements was Pharmavite's expansion in the city. In 2021, the Japanese-owned

company Otsuka spent an additional \$7.9 million to expand operations, a move that created 81 jobs for the local economy. "Our Northeast Opelika Industrial Park has all the utility infrastructure in place. That makes it very attractive to a company that needs to establish a greenfield location because we still have shovel-ready property available in that industrial park," Huguley said. "We are extremely interested in pharmaceutical and bioindustries from Japan, especially those looking to establish a location in the U.S. The city of Opelika is extremely business-friendly and your success is our No. 1 goal. With great community and leadership support, we help our companies do just that. We are here throughout the entire process as your partner," she added. ■ www.ChooseOpelika.com

CITY OF ARDMORE: PROMOTING OKLAHOMA TO JAPANESE COMPANIES

Only a 90-minute drive from the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area, one of the most populous urban centers in the United States, the city of Ardmore in neighboring Oklahoma is positioning itself as an up-and-coming growth center in the state as well as the country. "We believe that there are significant opportunities in Ardmore for companies that are in the green energy sector, given the area's historical strengths in oil and gas," said **Ardmore Development Authority President and CEO William Murphy**. In the past two years, Ardmore has attracted around \$1.7 billion in foreign direct investment, which included a landmark energy deal. The city has also witnessed the entry of aerospace, automotive



The city of Ardmore, Oklahoma is a growing community with an abundance of available land.

and logistics companies that are expanding their operations in the Southern U.S. Building on that momentum, the Ardmore Development Authority has stepped up its efforts to build more industrial sites to accommodate the expected influx of new investors to the area. "Our close proximity to a major market like Texas and the lower cost of doing business in a state like Oklahoma are among the things that we can start promoting to the Japanese in particular," Murphy said. "I think that Oklahoma has shown true commitment by opening an office to promote trade in the Asia-Pacific region. I believe that the state is now primed to show Japan that we are truly open for business," he added. ■ www.ardmore.org

MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY: BUILDING MIGHTY RELATIONSHIPS

The Mississippi River continues to play a pivotal role in the development of Mississippi. To maximize the advantages provided by the river, **Mississippi Development Authority (MDA)** has formed close partnerships with businesses and regional economic development groups to promote growth in the state. Flowing north to south along the country's industrial and agricultural heartland, the river allows easy access to the major business centers and the hinterlands of the United States, which is complemented by Mississippi's extensive road network, reliable rail service, well-serviced airports, and 15 ports, including two deepwater ports on the Gulf of Mexico. Apart from having one of the lowest corporate tax rates in the country, Mississippi is also very proud of its education system, which includes eight top-ranking universities — four of which are world-class research institutes — and 15 community colleges.

"Universities across our state continue to build on their impressive R&D initiatives, which have a strong focus on economic development. MDA has partnered with each one of these institutions to boost innovation and encourage collaboration, as they further strengthen their individual areas of expertise," said **Deputy Executive Director Laura Hipp**. Another achievement of Mississippi is its enduring partnership with Japanese companies, like Nissan and Toyota. Two decades ago, Nissan opened a manufacturing plant in Canton, which prompted Toyota and Yokohama Tires to do the same a few years after. Recently, Nissan announced a \$500 million investment to dedicate part of its Canton plant to the production of electric vehicles for its Nissan and Infiniti brands. "Mississippi understands each company needs workers with specialized training. With this in mind, the state's community

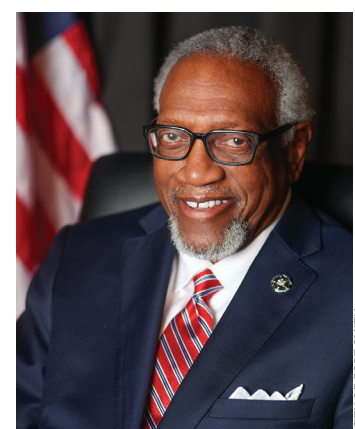


In February, Nissan announced that part of its manufacturing plant in Canton, Mississippi, will be used in the production of electric vehicles. college system, in partnership with AccelerateMS, customizes its already adaptable training programs to effectively meet the needs of each company for immediate and long-term success," Hipp said. "Mississippi's community colleges are able to quickly assess applicants and provide specialized training so that workers are



FORT SMITH: RAISING ITS PROFILE WITH JAPANESE BUSINESSES

Many people may not know that Fort Smith, Arkansas, is the state's third-largest city. Situated near major highways, railways and in close proximity to the Arkansas River, **Fort Smith** has attracted a lot of businesses over the years, giving it the highest concentration of manufacturers in the country. It is this logistical advantage that **City Administrator Carl Geffken** wants to promote to Japanese investors looking for the ideal location to base a company in the United States.



"The city of Fort Smith, the businesses that located here, the chamber of commerce, the school district have all been working together to make sure that we have highly qualified and motivated employees in the pipeline for whomever would like to locate here in Fort Smith," he said. Heartened by the presence of multinationals like ABB, Walmart, Glatfelter, Gerber Products, Rheem Manufacturing and Mars Petcare, **Mayor George McGill** is committed to bringing more growth to the city by bringing in even more foreign investment, particularly from Japan. "My top priority is to continue to make Fort Smith the lifeblood of this region. We want to see the growth plan continue and make sure we can handle the

infrastructure issues that come about as you grow," said McGill, who is confident the city can easily meet the demand for skilled, highly educated workers trained in manufacturing and the burgeoning sectors of logistics and health care. "We have a local university that works very closely with the manufacturing sector. Our business is to make sure they are turning out the skill sets that are needed to fill the jobs and careers at these companies. We have very close relationships with business and with the state capital with regards to economic development. We braid all of that together and make an irresistible offering," McGill stressed. ■ www.fortsmithar.gov

LSU AT EUNICE: FERTILE GROUND FOR EXCELLENCE

Established in 1964, **Louisiana State University, Eunice** has established a reputation for its agriculture and health-related programs. The university's associate degrees and certificate programs include nursing, diagnostic medical sonography, radiologic technology, respiratory therapy, surgical technology, anatomy and physiology.



Louisiana State University, Eunice has become well known for its two-year health-related degrees and certificate programs. Because of its high passing rates for students taking board exams for the first time, LSU Eunice has become a reliable source of nurses, medical equipment technicians and therapists for many health care providers in the state and in neighboring areas. **LSU Eunice Chancellor Nancee Sorenson** has ambitious plans for the school: to broaden the school's outlook and offer its faculty and students valuable experience outside Louisiana and even the United States, particularly in Japan. "We can start with exchange programs and summer programs. We can have collaborations with faculty in Japan in a variety of disciplines. I'd love to see our faculty get the opportunity to take advantage of the Fulbright scholarships and to have that experience to be able to go to Japan. We would certainly welcome the opportunity to have visiting scholars or visiting faculty in terms of our workforce collaboration," Sorenson said. LSU Eunice works closely with private-sector groups, research institutions, and nonprofit organizations in providing overseas internships programs for its students. "It would be a wonderful opportunity to meet with Japanese businesses, understand what they want out of a qualified workforce, and see how we can nurture those graduates through our programs," Sorenson explained. Building on its expertise in agriculture, LSU Eunice is creating, through an \$846,000 grant, the STEAM Innovation Center, which will focus on science, technology, engineering, agriculture and mathematics, confident that the initiative will ensure the long-term future of American farmers. ■ <https://www.lsu.edu>

TUPELO ROLLS OUT THE RED CARPET

In a competitive race to attract investment, thousands of cities and towns across the 50 states have formulated a variety of winning strategies, all of them highlighting their unique selling points and promoting a multitude of incentives. But, from Mississippi, there is a success story, one made into a case study frequently cited by experts in the United States. Tupelo in Mississippi has played the long game with regards to its growth plan, thanks to the consistent vision, steadfast commitment and quick action of the city's primary economic development agency, the 75-year-old **Community Development Foundation**.



"The Council of Governments is partly unique because we have eight municipalities and one county involved in a month-to-month meeting wherein they can raise all issues that they may face. That's what makes our area unique. There is a group approach to solving problems that affect the bigger community," explained **Tupelo/Lee County Community Development Foundation President and CEO David Rumbarger**. Among the city's most recent achievements was the opening of the North Lee Industrial Park, located just 20 minutes from downtown Tupelo, Tupelo Regional Airport, and Toyota subsidiary Auto Parts Manufacturing Mississippi Inc., in neighboring Guntown. "We have invested in six available buildings with 50,000 to 100,000 square feet of space.

Companies can come in and, within three to six months, be up and running with a workforce and a facility ready to produce goods for the marketplace. We try to shrink the time frame between decision and production, so that they can make money as soon as possible," Rumbarger said. "We've worked with the Japanese Consulate and with JETRO (the Japan External Trade Organization) to make sure that we are aligned with priorities of Japanese companies. As Japanese companies look at the area, we line up our resources to meet their needs and introduce them to the right partners so they can fulfill their plans," he added. ■ www.cdfms.org

SHINWA: JOINING THE WORLD, JOINING THE FUTURE



Shinwa's Smart Factory systems are used in factories across North America. Founded in 1951, leading Japanese engineering trading company **Shinwa Co.** opened its U.S. operations in Kentucky in 1987 as the first step to exporting its metal-joining expertise. After more than 70 years, Shinwa has expanded its operations to five divisions: the Joining Technology Center, Main-Tech Center, Smart Factory Innovation Center, Mechatronics Systems Center, and the Aerospace and Aircraft Center. Its Smart Factory Innovation Center specializes in the design, engineering, validation and implementation of diverse manufacturing and quality-monitoring control systems used in more than 20 countries around the world, including several automotive factories in North America. Shinwa has also diversified the product and service portfolio of its trading business by offering value-added technical support for manufacturers that want to increase productivity and improve quality control. It is also working on projects related to electrification, particularly laser welding technology used in battery manufacturing. "Once we validate and introduce that technology with our Japanese customers, more specifically EV (electric vehicle) battery manufacturers we are working with in Japan, we can bring that technology to our U.S. customers," explained **Shinwa Senior Managing Executive Officer Yoshiro Takitani**. Aware of the rapid changes in the global supply chain, the company is confident it can develop and deliver quick solutions to its global clientele. "Shinwa quickly adapts and implements new technologies so that we can better provide support to our business partners and customers," Takitani said. ■ www.shinwa-jpn.co.jp/english

MIGHTY strong

MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi is at the heart of the world's automotive industry, with heavy hitters like Nissan, Toyota, Yokohama and numerous components manufacturers depending on the state's dedicated workforce to produce and deliver top-quality products to consumers around the globe.

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