

ALABAMA

2027 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

A comprehensive
resource for site
selection

INSIDE

Development Incentives
Success Stories
Economic Sectors
International Trade
Business Resources
Statewide &
Regional Economies
Economic
Development Agencies

GATEWAY TO THE WORLD

GOODS FROM ACROSS
THE STATE SAIL FOR
WORLDWIDE MARKETS
FROM THE PORT IN MOBILE

FROM THE PUBLISHER OF



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ON THE COVER: The Port of Mobile, with its newly deepened shipping channel, handles billions of dollars' worth of international trade. *Photo courtesy of Alabama Port Authority.*

Photos: 21. Birdon has invested more than \$27 million to transform the Bayou La Batre site into a Tier 2 shipyard. *Photo by Mike Kittrell.* 51. Karl Hertel drives the Honda Odyssey that frequently performs in National Auto Sports Association driving events. *Photo by Cary Norton.* 62. Alabama Port Authority facilities line the bank of the Mobile River, the gateway for billions in international commerce. *Photo courtesy of Alabama Port Authority.*

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Greetings from Alabama Governor Kay Ivey



This 2027 Alabama Economic Development Guide is a tremendous resource and an opportunity to share details about our state's growth and upward trajectory.

When I became governor nearly a decade ago, expanding economic development opportunities and bringing more well-paying jobs to Alabamians across the state were top priorities.

Bettering this state's economic outlook has always been top of mind for me. And when I leave office in January, I believe the numbers will speak for themselves.

From 2017 through 2025, Alabama has added more than \$70 billion in new capital investments and created some 104,000 jobs — and counting — through new and expanded economic development projects.

In 2025, Alabama had a record-breaking \$14.6 billion in new investments — and we are on track to beat that number in my final year in office.

Job creation is long-term planning and legislation to make and keep Alabama the most business-friendly state in the nation and to give us an edge over other states competing for new industry.

It is the Jobs Act that created the state's signature economic development incentives that reward companies for

jobs created and investments made. It's the 2023 Game Plan that updated those incentives and created the Site Evaluation and Economic Development Strategy Act. Between SEEDS and the Growing Alabama Tax Credit, more than \$300 million has been put into site development around the state since 2018.

Those are ready-to-go sites that Alabama communities can show to potential industry. That's long-term planning; that's investing today in the jobs we want tomorrow.

We have also focused on small businesses and rural communities, with enhanced incentives for projects that leverage the tremendous resources and talented workforces found throughout the state. In 2025 alone, the state announced \$2 billion in projects in rural counties.

Economic development is also about partnerships. Some of Alabama's greatest strengths are our collaborations among public and private entities all around the state.

The industries and projects may vary, but the goal is the same statewide: Improve the lives of all Alabamians through expanded development and opportunities.

I am proud that Alabama is stronger, more competitive and better positioned for continued growth. The numbers tell an important story — but behind every number is an Alabamian with a job, a family with a brighter future and a community with new opportunity. And I am confident: The best is yet to come!

Sincerely,

Kay Ivey
Governor of Alabama

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STATEWIDE ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

Just last year, Huntsville was hand-picked as the location of the U.S. Space Command. Even before the first workers arrived, the city was hand-picked again — this time for a \$6 billion pharmaceutical plant for Eli Lilly.

Both projects build on a firm foundation in North Alabama.

Huntsville has boasted a NASA presence since 1960 with the Marshall Space Flight Center. That has attracted dozens and dozens of aerospace and defense companies, clustered about Redstone Arsenal. With the Space Command headquarters, local officials expect an even bigger economic boost.

Building on that high tech foundation and the intellectual capital it attracts, the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology chose to locate in Huntsville some 20 years ago — broadening the range of technology that thrives here. So, the Eli Lilly decision again builds on what's already here.

In South Alabama, the Port of Mobile completed a multi-year, \$366 million expansion. Its ocean-going international shipping and the Port of Huntsville's airborne international shipping contributed to some \$23.7 billion in international trade.

And tourism set a record for the fifth consecutive year — contributing \$24.9 billion to the state's economy.

While some elements of the economy kept experts guessing, most hummed along like clockwork.

Space and defense are headliners in the north. Automakers are paramount in Vance and Montgomery, Lincoln and Huntsville.

Aircraft production is the newest headliner in South Alabama, attracting its own cluster of related business. And, for the third century in a row, Mobile has been home to major local and international shipbuilders.

And a new specialty has developed somewhat unexpectedly — submarines. Shipbuilder Austal began making modules. The

Alabama Community College System, backbone of the state's workforce training, added programs to prepare workers for the industry. And a new module plant kicked off in the Shoals.

Staples like trees, chickens and chemicals provide a broad economic base.

To support all that commerce, the Alabama Port Authority has finished its five-year project to deepen and widen the port —

the port in Mobile is now the deepest container port on the Gulf Coast — and inland container hubs are in progress in Montgomery and Decatur. Norfolk Southern, meanwhile, is investing \$200 million to improve its 3B Corridor, which connects portions of northern and central Alabama to the port.

Again in 2025, worldwide industries picked Alabama for new industrial plants — from modular nuclear work in partnership with Japan in North Alabama to a Taiwanese auto supplier in Gadsden to a Canadian data center developer to South Korean steel and transformer companies and a geothermal power generation plant down South. One

more international arrival — an FC Barcelona soccer academy in Hoover.

Technology is standard here, with innovative companies supporting a vast array of space and defense projects.

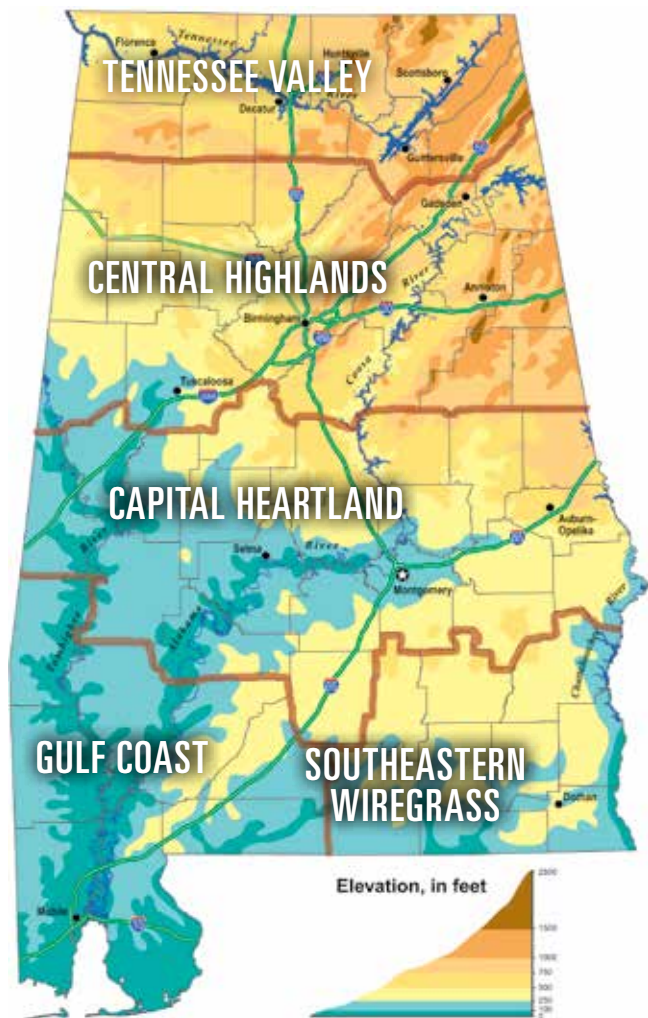
Biotech is big news here, too.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham and its neighbor, Southern Research, have teamed to provide cancer drugs, relief from COVID-19 and more, while the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology in Huntsville provides cutting-edge research in genetics and encourages a quick path from research to remedy. Just last year, Southern Research moved into a new \$98 million biotech center in Birmingham.

The state also has new data centers to support Google and Facebook, and Gunter Annex at Maxwell Air Force Base is home to that service's information technology experts. Several additional data centers were announced, while Google unveiled



REGIONAL OVERVIEW



plans to invest an additional \$1.5 billion in its Jackson County facility.

The state took special pride in the 2026 launch of Artemis II, which sent four astronauts around the moon as NASA works toward returning astronauts to the lunar surface. Meanwhile, work is in progress at Marshall Space Flight Center to puzzle out ways of building infrastructure on the moon to support long-term life there and create a stepping-stone to the planets beyond.

In less than 30 years, Alabama has moved to the forefront of American automobile manufacturing. Since Mercedes-Benz opted to build its first U.S. plant in Vance in Tuscaloosa County in the mid-1990s, automotive work has been a highlight of Alabama's economy. The state boasts five major manufacturers — Mercedes, plus Hyundai in Montgomery, Honda in Lincoln, Mazda Toyota in Huntsville and a major Toyota engine plant, also in Huntsville. All those plants are introducing new electric models, and many have launched expansions and upgrades to make the new vehicles.

Alabama's contribution to the nation's ground transportation doesn't stop at cars and SUVs. We build railroad cars, buses and trucks, too.

Hankering to move cargo? We build ships, too. Mobile has been a shipbuilding hub for centuries. Today Austal USA dominates the Mobile waterfront, building ships for the U.S. Navy. And the Port of Mobile is among the busiest in the nation.

Want to get there faster? We build airplanes, too. Since 2015, Mobile has been home to the only U.S. final assembly line for European aircraft giant Airbus, delivering A320 and A220 family commercial jets. Now the company has added its third FAL, markedly increasing production and employment.

And if you need to get there really, really fast — think Huntsville and Decatur. That's where we build rockets. The workaday rockets that take many of America's payloads to space are crafted at United Launch Alliance in Decatur and the spacecraft of the future at NASA in Huntsville, with key elements coming from an array of the nation's biggest space and defense contractors — Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon — along with newcomers like Blue Origin, Beyond Gravity and Aerojet Rocketdyne.

Defense industries flex their muscle in North Alabama, clustered around Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville. The missiles to protect America from threats are designed and built there and in Pike County. Military folks also take care of land vehicles in Anniston and helicopters in Dothan.

The old Fort McClellan in Anniston now trains the nation's first responders for whatever catastrophe may arise — from an Ebola outbreak to an earthquake. And the Coast Guard trains its aviators in Mobile, ready to thwart drug smugglers, protect ports and rescue those stranded on the high seas. Plus, the Coast Guard has opened a new training center in Birmingham.

For decades, Alabama's universities have built football legends, but Alabama's higher-education system is much more than sports. Arts, law, medicine, pharmacy, business — all help today's students flourish as tomorrow's leaders. Working in partnership with the state's colleges and universities and with its industrial sector, the Alabama Community College System prepares students to pursue a higher degree or a high-tech industrial career.

For all that Alabamians build, create, blast off, launch or study, the state's roots run deeper still. Crops thrive on farms rich with Black Belt soil; cotton creates a landscape of white; trees soar to the skies. Seafood thrives in the Gulf waters. And Alabama chickens feed millions here and abroad.

Beneath the surface there's coal — Alabama is among the nation's major coal exporters. Warrior Met Coal has opened a new \$500 million mine and a \$50 million barge loading facility to take that coal to market. Westwater Resources is taking initial steps to process graphite in Coosa County, anticipating the market created by automotive batteries.

All the while that manufacturing thrums, commerce hums, research expands our horizons and agriculture grows, Alabama continues to attract more and more people who just want to enjoy — staring in awe at the rockets towering overhead at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, thrilling to the zoom of NASCAR at Talladega, fishing, hunting, hiking, canoeing, watching Shakespeare or just relaxing on the sugar-white sand of Alabama's Gulf Coast beaches.



TENNESSEE VALLEY

Rockets roar, autos roll and North Alabama commerce rocks on

Now more than ever, Alabama aims for the stars.

For nearly three-quarters of a century, scientists have worked diligently in Huntsville to convert dreams of space exploration into the realities of rockets, satellites, telescopes and propulsion systems. Now the area has been tapped as home to the U.S. Space Command.

In the mid-1950s, the federal government brought a team of former German rocket scientists to the nearly defunct Redstone Arsenal. From that quiet start, the U.S. leaped into the space race — an effort that continues today as NASA and a host for companies, big and small, work to develop the mighty new Space Launch System. No longer aiming just for the moon but also for the planets beyond, the Space Launch System will be bigger and faster, able once again to carry humankind beyond the known.

And a team at Marshall Space Flight Center is strategizing about how to build the infrastructure on the moon for those next giant steps.

When Artemis I launched in late 2022, it carried an Alabama pedigree with key elements designed and crafted by Marshall Space Flight Center, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Dynetics, United Launch Alliance and more.

Huntsville had hoped to be home to Space Command for years. Now it's reality, and the first workers have transitioned from Colorado to the new HQ.

Even as they work on the newest of rockets in Huntsville, Boeing and Lockheed Martin team in a joint venture called United Launch Alliance in nearby Decatur, building the Atlas and Delta rockets that have long been the mainstays of U.S. spaceflight, plus the newer Vulcan rocket. ULA is doubling in size to meet the demands of the Amazon Leo Project. Blue Origin is new-

est to the flock, chosen to develop a new engine for those ULA rockets — one that will replace the Russian-made version. And now United Launch Alliance has been tapped to build the upper-stage rocket when Artemis IV



ABOVE: The Rocket City Trash Pandas play at Toyota Field. Photo courtesy of the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce.

REGIONAL PROFILE

and V roll out.

Always on the cutting edge, Huntsville is also working with Sierra Space as it prepares to land the firm's Dream Chaser spacecraft on the runways at Huntsville International Airport — maybe even this year.

As glamorous as its rocketry may be, the northernmost region of Alabama has many more facets. National defense goes hand in hand with Huntsville's space science. Clustered around Redstone Arsenal are firms that design and build missiles to protect the country and simulations to help soldiers learn to make the right decision in an instant. Huntsville is also home to a major FBI campus.

Cummings Research Park, one of the largest in the nation, and the newer Redstone Gateway are home to an array of defense firms like those that encircle the Pentagon. The synergy of space science and defense engineering has attracted scientific minds to Alabama's northern tier — not limited to those original fields.

In fact, Huntsville and its variety of opportunities have propelled it past Birmingham as Alabama's largest city. And Limestone County, which includes part of Huntsville, is the state's fastest growing for the seventh straight year.

Automaking is a big player here. Toyota has operated a major engine plant for some 20 years, and a newcomer, Mazda Toyota Manufacturing, is using one plant to build both the Toyota Corolla Cross and the Mazda CX-50.

Meta, which kicked off a massive data center five years ago,

now says its expected \$750 million investment could well reach \$1 billion. Google's data center in Jackson County, at the northeast corner of the state, is now operational, and the firm announced plans to increase its investment there by \$1.5 billion.

The Tennessee Valley is also home to some of the state's brightest lights in biotechnology.

HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology focuses on encouraging biomedical researchers and entrepreneurs to work together so that new developments can come efficiently to the marketplace. HudsonAlpha is making a name for itself and for Alabama in the intricate world of genetic research.

Building on the biotech economy, Eli Lilly is building a \$6 billion pharmaceutical plant in Limestone County.

The northern tier's other industry is as varied as your imagination. Hadrian has opened a plant in Colbert County to build submarine modules; JST Corp. plans a \$500 million plant to make electrical connectors in Guntersville; Virginia Transformer is at work on a major plant in the Shoals; Constellium makes the sheet metal for food and beverage containers in the Shoals, and its new furnace can recycle 20 billion aluminum cans a year. Carpenter Technology works on additive manufacturing technology in Athens; GE Appliances makes refrigerators and more; Ascend Performance Materials makes high-tech plastics; and the U.S. and Japan have reached a \$40 billion agreement for new facilities including plans for a modular nuclear reactor in Hollywood. Steelmaker Nucor aims to build transmission towers at a new Decatur facility.

Keeping the workforce up to date, Alabama's robotics center at Calhoun Community College trains workers to operate and maintain the high-tech machines, while offering space for industry to design and test robotic components.

Agriculture is strong here, too. Marshall County leads the state in poultry processing and ranks second for producing poultry.

The Tennessee Valley Authority, which provides power to the region, set a record for power generation in 2025.

It's not all work and no play here. The Tennessee River brings opportunities for fishing, hunting, birding, even riding a riverboat as it flows through these northern counties.

Music is nearly as fundamental to the Shoals as the water itself. This is the home of Muscle Shoals Sound and FAME Recording Studios, where some of the biggest names in pop music recorded — from Aretha Franklin to the Rolling Stones. And Huntsville's Orion Amphitheater has been drawing some of music's top acts since opening in 2022.

And baseball joined the mix when Madison opened its new ballpark, home to the Los Angeles Angels' Double-A team, the Rocket City Trash Pandas.





CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

High tech, biotech, autos and commerce keep the highlands humming

Alabama's Central Highlands area is grounded in coal and steel. From that solid foundation, the region has grown and prospered in an economy including everything from higher education and healthcare to insurance and banking to biotech and info tech with data centers a major new player.

Stretching from the foothills of the Appalachians in the east to the University of Alabama in the west, the Central Highlands region also boasts two of the state's major automakers and the world-famous Talladega Superspeedway.

As data centers, biotech research and information technology flourish here, Forbes magazine pondered whether Birmingham may earn a new moniker as "the Southern Silicon Valley."

The updated image is another tribute to the adaptability of Alabama's Central Highlands.

Born in the steel industry, Birmingham still counts major manufacturers like American Cast Iron Pipe Co., U.S. Pipe and Foundry, McWane Inc. and O'Neal Industries among the stalwarts of its economy. Just two years ago, U.S. Steel fired up a new electric arc furnace at its plant in Fairfield, modernizing this basic industry — before being acquired by Nippon Steel. And in 2026 it invested \$475 million in a new quench and tempering line. And Warrior Met Coal is still a major player here, with a new mine and a new loading dock.

But more advanced industries have grown from those basics.

Banking gives Alabama its own homegrown Fortune 500 company — Regions Financial. Regions has earned the prestigious President's "E" Award for supporting exports, just as the state set an export record.

Downtown is also home to Infinity Property & Casualty, now part of Kemper, and to ProAssurance, now part of The Doctors Company, as well as the headquarters of Protective Life, recently purchased as a U.S. foothold for Dai-ichi Life of Japan.

Biotechnology is a major player here, too. Nurtured by the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Southern Research, medical care is offered for those in need today while teams of scientists search for the causes and cures for ills still hard to treat. New medicines and medical devices are always in development. Seven current FDA-approved cancer drugs have been developed at Southern Research, while UAB is launching the state's first proton therapy option for advanced cancer care. Both have been major players in the fight to tame COVID-19.

More recently, UAB announced plans for a \$76 million



ABOVE: Railroad Park adds 19 acres of green space to downtown Birmingham.



A Mercedes-Benz U.S. International team member puts the finishing touches on a Mercedes Maybach. Photo courtesy of Mercedes-Benz U.S. International.

biotech research facility, and Southern Research announced plans for an incubator for young biotech firms. Both have new buildings — a \$98 million home for Southern Research and a \$157 million inpatient rehab facility at UAB.

Arts, sports, entertainment and an array of eateries show Birmingham as

the major city it is — among the largest in the Southeast. The city boasts seven James Beard Award-winning chefs and restaurants.

Tuscaloosa is home to the University of Alabama. A highly ranked educational institution, Bama also fields one of the most recognizable football squads in

the nation, repeatedly winning national championships while attracting crowds to the university city. Ground has been broken for the Saban Center, a STEM and arts facility named after the legendary Crimson Tide coach and his wife.

The Tuscaloosa County city of Vance boasts another claim to fame as the wellspring of Alabama's auto-making industry. In the mid-1990s, Mercedes-Benz U.S. International announced plans to launch a U.S. plant, and Vance beat out all rivals for the honors. MBUSI has grown and expanded repeatedly over the years, building popular luxury SUVs and in 2022 introducing its first all-electric vehicle, while making batteries in nearby Bibb County. In 2025, it sold 303,200 passenger vehicles, a 20% increase over the previous year. Mercedes is Alabama's leading exporter, sending vehicles to countries around the world.

Talladega County has a pair of auto-related success stories. Like Tuscaloosa, it's home to one of Alabama's major auto plants. Honda, which recently announced a \$472 million upgrade, builds the Odyssey minivan, the Pilot SUV, the Ridgeline pickup and the Passport models in Lincoln. And across the county, speed dominates the auto scene at the Talladega Superspeedway, famous for its sizzling speeds and challenging curves. If speed's your thing, don't miss the Barber Motorsports Museum, in Jefferson County, with hundreds of vintage motorcycles and a great view of the motorcycle and Indy races on the nearby course.

The Central Highlands also are home to the cities of Cullman, Anniston and Gadsden — all big contributors to the Alabama economy.

Gadsden, located on the Coosa River and home to the scenic Nockalula Falls, has shown new energy with the revitalization of its riverfront and the construction of a new city hall and athletic complex. Gadsden State Community College has opened its new Advanced Manufacturing Center, providing state-of-the-art equipment for workforce training.

A pacesetter city, Anniston was first in Alabama to be wired for electricity, in

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The Coosa River, flowing through the Central Highlands, provides both recreation opportunities and power generation.

1882, and it added telephones in 1884. Its major employer is the Anniston Army Depot, the maintenance center for tracked vehicles. Nearby McClellan, a planned community growing on the site of the former Fort McClellan, also hosts the Department of Homeland Security's Center for Domestic Preparedness, helping first responders from across the nation be prepared, whether they face Ebola or an earthquake. Like its Central Highlands neighbors, Anniston and Calhoun County are also home to automotive supplier firms that have emerged in the past 20 years.

Cullman has kept its agricultural roots strong. It's one of the nation's top 60 counties for agricultural income. But Cullman has taken to the highways as well. The county is also home to three relatively new Tier 1 auto suppliers and a host of smaller firms.

The region has seen its share of the state's economic development wins, too. Jefferson County boasted \$400 million in new projects during 2025 led by the \$150 million Alabama Farm Center in Warrior. Coca-Cola Bottling Co. United has invested \$330 million in a new headquarters in Birmingham. And the U.S. Coast Guard has converted the former campus of Birmingham-Southern College, which closed a couple of years ago, into a training center.

In Gadsden, Magneco/Metrel is investing \$8 million in a new-to-it facility to make refractory products. And the 2.9-million-square-foot former Goodyear plant in Gadsden, empty after Goodyear moved on, has new life as a renewable energy materials hub for Tekkion. Also, in Gadsden, automotive supplier Minth has broken ground for a new facility at the former Gulf States Steel plant, which is expected to bring more than 1,300 jobs and \$430 million in capital investment.

Wire and cable maker Southwire has announced a \$175 million investment in its plant in Heflin in Cleburne County.

And the huge new J.M. Smucker plant, a \$1.1 billion investment in McCalla, is crafting the company's popular Uncrustables sandwiches.



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CAPITAL HEARTLAND

A rich and varied land, both prosperous and forward-thinking

Alabama's Capitol stands in the heart of the state, beautiful above the Alabama River and signifying all the elements of government that keep the state thriving. Montgomery is also an eclectic mix of Alabama history and Alabama future.

This Alabama heartland lies in the famed Black Belt and once produced cotton to clothe the world. The sounds of agriculture still fill the air, but the fields now sprout products undreamed of when plantation life was at its peak. Today you'll find catfish ponds where the farmers raise \$120 million in fish and harvest the algae to make biodegradable plastic, and even an inland

shrimp farm or two.

Trees grow here, too, for construction, paper and more. And the leftovers — the sawdust, chips and bits and pieces from tree trimming — are processed into pellets that substitute for coal. More traditional forest products thrive here. International Paper followed a recent \$550 million investment in its Selma mill with another \$250 million investment in 2025.

Also growing here is one of the most sophisticated cyber networks in the nation, a Montgomery-based partnership among local government, the Air Force internet experts at the Maxwell Air Force Base plus education and industry.

Meta, parent of Facebook, is investing \$1.5 billion in a data center here.

There's another new product growing here, too — SUVs and trucks rolling off the line at Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama — which has produced more than 6 million vehicles as of May 2025. The multibillion-dollar, 2-million-square-foot plant opened in 2005 and today produces 360,000 vehicles a year. Hyundai has invested more than \$3 billion in expansions and new technologies in the Montgomery plant, attracting a host of supplier firms.

Montgomery saw one of the state's big-



Alabama's Capitol building. Photo by Bryan Carter, courtesy of Montgomery Tourism.

TOP: Hyundai builds more than 350,000 vehicles a year in Montgomery. Photo courtesy of Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama.

MIDDLE: Gov. Kay Ivey addresses the crowd at the groundbreaking of the Montgomery Intermodal Container Transfer Facility in February, 2025. Photo courtesy of the Governor's Office.

BOTTOM. Learning the practical skills of nursing at Auburn University at Montgomery's College of Nursing & Health Sciences. Photo by Frank Williams, courtesy of Auburn University at Montgomery.

gest economic development announcements of 2025 when London-based Diageo unveiled plans for a \$412 million facility. The firm handles brands like Johnnie Walker, Guinness and Tanqueray.

And new warehouse and distribution centers — led by a \$100 million Amazon investment — are taking advantage of the busy transportation network.

Serving all that industry, the Alabama Port Authority is building a container terminal in Montgomery to help ship goods to the state's deepwater port in Mobile.

Montgomery is a living mix of history and trendy lifestyle all centered on the Capitol complex. Just for fun, the city and county have opened Montgomery Whitewater, a \$40 million water park with a whitewater course near the Alabama River.

Education is a cornerstone of the Capital Heartland. Auburn University, the state's original land-grant university, lies in the eastern edge of the region. Programs in engineering, architecture and veterinary medicine are hallmarks of the school. A branch of the Virginia-based Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine also is in Auburn.

Education made news, too. Tuskegee University is starting a flight training program. And a brand-new health sciences high school has started classes in Livingston as its new campus in Demopolis is under construction.

The campus region also is home to a variety of high-tech businesses like GE Aerospace's innovative 3D printing plant that makes jet engine components. That sector is set to grow as GE Aerospace signed a contract to provide 400 jet engines to Qatar Airways — the largest engine deal in history — with work to be completed in Auburn, Huntsville and



REGIONAL PROFILE



More than 300 company, state and local officials gathered to open auto supplier Samkee Corp.'s plant in Tuskegee in June 2024. Photo courtesy of Alabama Department of Commerce.

elsewhere around the country.

Business makes headlines across the Heartland.

Auto supplier firms Samkee and Samkwang are recent additions to the array serving Hyundai.

Owens Corning is building a major plant in Prattville, in Autauga County. And Hyundai Power Transformer kicked off a \$200 million expansion at its Montgomery plant.

And Callan JMB, a healthcare logistics and storage company, has moved onto the idle Judson College campus in Perry County, hoping to keep a supply of critical pharmaceuticals in the U.S.

During 2024, Meridiam began a \$230 million fiber optic project in Selma, Two Rivers Lumber announced plans for a new \$115 million lumber mill in Coosa County, and German appli-

ance maker Miele announced plans for a new plant in Opelika.

Graphite deposits are attracting activity to Coosa County like iron to a magnet. Westwater Resources began work on a graphite processing plant in Kellyton, a \$602 million project, which recently won patents for its processing technology. In mid-2026, the firm secured a \$25 million loan from the Export-Import Bank to support construction. The plant is slated to open in 2027. Also, Canadian firm South Star Battery Metals took the first steps toward reopening a graphite mine. The draw: graphite is a critical component in the high-performance batteries needed to power electric vehicles.

Butler County is home to a new \$86 million solar farm in Greenville. Chambers County has seen two expansions at John Soules Foods in Valley, totaling more than \$60 million.

Macon County has started work on the 683-acre Regional East Alabama Logistics Park.

Phenix City is home to a world-class whitewater course on the Chattahoochee River, a partnership with Columbus, Georgia, on the opposite bank.

And you can get a close-up look at the history of the civil rights movement by following U.S. Highway 80 from Selma to Montgomery, traveling in the footsteps of the civil rights marchers from the Edmund Pettus Bridge to the Capitol steps.

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SOUTHEASTERN WIREGRASS

Crops and choppers

On the ground and in the air, Alabama's Wiregrass is thriving. On the ground are crops to feed the Southeast and beyond — especially if they're hankering for peanuts or chicken. Pointing skyward are the trees to feed the lumber and paper mills.

In between are new industrial plants, busy participants in the state's economic clusters of aviation, aerospace, automotive and beyond. And in the air are the aircraft — especially missiles and helicopters — that are the new face of the Wiregrass economy.

This southeastern corner of the state, nestled alongside Georgia and just north of the Florida Panhandle, is the epicenter of the nation's peanut crop. More than half the peanuts grown in the U.S. are grown within 100 miles of Dothan, which honors the

tasty legume with an annual festival. It's such an important crop that the city of Enterprise has a statue honoring the boll weevil, which forced farmers to find an alternative to cotton.

Chickens are part of the agricultural mix, too, with several plants that process broilers among the major employers.

Two food-related companies made big announcements for the Wiregrass in 2024. Iconic brand Conecuh Sausage, a fixture in nearby Evergreen since 1947, announced plans for a new plant — a \$57.8 million investment — in the Wiregrass city of Andalusia, in Covington County. The same month that Conecuh made its headlines, Southern Roots Nut Co. announced plans for a new \$17 million plant in Dothan.

And one more crop defines the agriculture of the Wiregrass — trees. Forests feed the lumber mills and provide the raw materials for sawmills, paper and wood-products plants big and small. Rex Lumber is among the newest to the Wiregrass, but it moved in in a big way, with a \$110 million investment in a yellow pine sawmill in Troy.

In Henry County, Abbeville Fiber LLC has invested \$40 million in a new mill to provide wood for Great Southern Wood Preserving Inc. The first logs arrived in 2019, with plans to handle 80 to 90 truckloads of logs a day at full capacity.

Henry County also has seen more than \$10 million in invest-



ABOVE: An Apache lifts off at Fort Rucker.
Photo courtesy of David Agan/Fort Rucker.



LEFT: A rendering of Lockheed Martin's new THAAD facility in Troy. *Courtesy of Lockheed Martin.* RIGHT: In 2025, Conecuh Sausage opened its new manufacturing facility in Andalusia. *Photo by Skip Enzor.*

ments in peanut processing operations, a cotton gin and other agricultural improvements.

While farmers and foresters have tended to their crops, a new realm of industry has flown into the Wiregrass in the contrail of Fort Rucker. The Army base opened in 1942 to train troops, but in less than a decade was reimagined as the Army's aviation training facility. It continues to fill that role today, training Army and Air Force helicopter pilots, as well as those from U.S. allies around the world.

M1 Support Services, which provides aviation maintenance and more to Fort Rucker from its Dale County location, is consistently the largest industrial employer in the region with more than 5,000 employees.

CAE USA won a major Army contract and opened a new facility in 2017, training Army aviators. A major fleet of helicopters at Fort Rucker has attracted its own cluster of supporters. Lockheed Martin, Sikorsky and Bell Helicopter all maintain a presence nearby.

Dothan also boasts a healthy MRO sector — companies that perform aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul. Commercial Jet has been the key firm in that cluster since 2013.

Yulista Holdings has a new facility in Andalusia where it maintains both fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft.

All those aircraft-related businesses allow the region to take full advantage of the Alabama Aviation Center campus in nearby Ozark.

Houston County welcomed two big business announcements recently — a \$62 million expansion at SmartLam North America, which makes cross-laminated timber products, and a \$30 million pellet plant being built by Peak Renewables.

The Wiregrass is an important player in Alabama's higher education scene, too, as home to Troy University. Troy has built a reputation as an international campus, welcoming overseas students and offering Troy classes abroad — including at a new

facility in South Korea. Dothan is also home to one of the state's medical schools, the Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine. The school's first students completed coursework in 2017.

And the region serves the state's military in yet one more way — welcoming patients at the state's fifth veterans' home in Enterprise.

Along with the staples of agriculture, aircraft, Army and medicine, the Wiregrass is also home to several of Alabama's most newsworthy businesses.

Lockheed Martin maintains its Pike County facility in Troy, building missiles to protect the world. The defense powerhouse is now doubling the size of its Pike County facility with the goal of nearly doubling its output of missiles. In 2026, it signed an agreement with the state for support of its Pike County facility with a promise to invest some \$150 million over the next five years.

Also in Troy is KW Plastics, among the largest of plastics recycling facilities anywhere.

Barbour County is anticipating the arrival of South Korean aluminum manufacturer ALMAC, which plans to begin production in 2027 on the site of a former Nucor plant.

Ecore International's new \$25 million tire recycling plant is now open in Ozark in Dale County. The company uses the old tires to make flooring.

Fishing is big business in Eufaula. The city is home to Humminbird-Johnson Outdoors, which makes fish finders, depth sounders, marine radios and GPS systems for anglers, while a neighboring company, Strikezone Lures, makes fishing lures.

Also in Eufaula, look for Southern Plastics, maker of wiggly plastic fishing worms for some of the nation's biggest retailers.

And over in Enterprise, you'll find Enterprise Electronics. Lest you expect an appliance store, be assured that this is the home of a remarkable product — the Doppler weather radar used around the world to protect us all from approaching storms.



GULF COAST

Ports, planes, ships and surf

Mobile's deep-water seaport has long been Alabama's connection to the wide world. Shipbuilding and shipping have been mainstays for centuries.

That tradition continues today, but now airplanes thrive alongside shipbuilders. Austal USA, making ultramodern ships for the Navy, dominates the downtown waterfront and is the largest

employer by far. And it continues to grow with new capabilities year after year.

Hidden farther from the public eye, along the bayous of south Mobile County, smaller shipyards rear above backcountry roads, crafting tugboats, offshore platform tenders, shrimp boats and more. Master Boat Builders has built the nation's first electric tugboat, destined for the Port of San Diego, and is at work on more. And now, it, too, has won a U.S. Navy contract.

Silver Ships just added a second location to its facilities.

And Birdon, in Bayou La Batre, just won a \$1 billion Coast Guard contract for waterways commerce cutters and invested \$27 million to prepare for the work.

Just a few miles away, Airbus builds commercial jets from the A220 and A320 families, augmenting the fleets of U.S. and overseas carriers for more than 10 years now. Its third final assembly line opened in late 2025 — doubling the footprint and workforce and boosting production to help meet a global order backlog. Thanks to Airbus, Mobile has become one of the world's largest aircraft cities.

Supplier firms like MAAS Aviation are stepping up their investment to match.

It's sometimes hard to remember that aviation was big business in Mobile before Airbus came to town. Continental Aerospace Technologies, one of the aviation firms that predates Airbus, is at work on a \$70 million upgrade. And in 2026, its ownership transitioned back from China to the U.S.

Baldwin County, across the bay, also boasts a major cluster of aerospace firms — Collins Aerospace, making nacelles and more, is that county's largest industrial employer and growing.



ABOVE: In 2025, Airbus marked its 10th year producing aircraft in Mobile. The company recently completed its third final assembly line. Photo courtesy of Airbus.

REGIONAL PROFILE



And the air over coastal counties frequently thrums with the sound of Coast Guard helicopters, taking off from their national training facility at Mobile's commercial airport, while also protecting waterborne commerce and keeping all of us safe on the water.

Meanwhile, the Alabama Port Authority operates Alabama's gateway to the world, where ships laden with coal, steel, chickens, chemicals and wood products head for ports around the world. The port has just completed massive improvements — \$366 million worth — deepening the channel and extending docks, while also adding the containers, cold storage and cranes to move ever more goods. And a roll on/roll off terminal is offering a new gateway for Alabama's automotive products, the state's largest export.

Steel, chemicals and timber also are big business along the Gulf Coast.

At the Mobile-Washington County line is a huge steel operation. Stainless facilities are run by Finnish firm Outokumpu Oyj and the next-door cold roll mill is owned by ArcelorMittal. Until 2025, Nippon Steel was partnered with ArcelorMittal, but when Nippon got the green light to acquire U.S. Steel, it had to bow

out. Almost immediately, ArcelorMittal announced an additional \$1.2 billion facility at the Calvert site.

TOP: Birdon has invested more than \$27 million to transform the Bayou La Batre site into a Tier 2 shipyard. *Photo by Mike Kittrell.*
BOTTOM: Novelis, under construction in Baldwin County, is investing \$4.1 billion in its plant. *Photo courtesy of Baldwin Alliance.*

out. Almost immediately, ArcelorMittal announced an additional \$1.2 billion facility at the Calvert site.

Chemical plants line the riverbanks, winding inland from the bay — making products from herbicides to sugar substitutes.

And now the coast is sorting out a new line of work — an Amazon sortation center and a Walmart distribution center opened within a few miles of each other, taking advantage of the interstate, port, air and rail connections. And a new \$350 million logistics park is in progress to help goods get to the port. Grocer Aldi and food service firm Imperial Dade have new distribution facilities in Baldwin County across the bay.

Near the port, Chart Industries is adding a second plant to build massive cryogenic tanks, less than five years after launching its business in Theodore. Frito-Lay has invested \$8 million in a new facility in Prichard. And SSAB steel is investing \$12 million in its north Mobile County plant for a new furnace.

Baldwin County welcomed Novelis Inc. to its industrial megasite. The Georgia-based firm is investing some \$4 billion to create an aluminum plant there, part of its massive global operation recycling aluminum into reuse-ready sheets.

In 2024, Baldwin announced plans for the Port Alabama Industrial Center in Loxley, a new industrial park with quick Interstate 10 access to Mobile's port. And Kaishin Compressor announced plans for an \$11 million expansion in Loxley, followed by a 2026 announcement of a \$74.5 million investment in its subsidiary, Terravanta Power Systems, with plans for a facility to support geothermal power generation.

In Clarke County, Advantage Capital and Origis Energy, both based in New York, announced a \$200 million commitment to support the Walker Springs I and II solar projects.

In Escambia County, farmers and merchants have teamed on a new peanut-processing plant, allowing local growers to increase their share of profits from their first-quality produce.

In Atmore, the Poarch Creek Indians have started a \$29 million meat-processing plant.

Paper made headlines, too. Kimberly-Clark announced a \$130 million investment in its Mobile plant, and a few months later Georgia-Pacific announced an \$800 million upgrade to its mill in Monroe County. Also in Monroe County, Bad Boy Mowers has invested \$10 million in the shuttered Vanity Fair plant there.

But the glory of the Gulf Coast is the beach. Just last year, Gulf Shores International Airport added commercial passenger flights to attract even more visitors, who have learned the Alabama secret. And in 2026, ground was broken for a terminal expansion to handle the popular flights.

When Alabamians think of sprawling Baldwin County, they could be thinking of pleasant suburbs, timberland, agriculture, aircraft companies and more — but most likely they're thinking of the beach. Condos with stunning views, zoos, amusement parks — including the fabulous Owa built by the Poarch Creek Indians — seafood, sports venues, fishing and fun, all stretch along some of the most beautiful beach in the world. White sand, brilliant sunshine, clear water — it's Alabama's playground.

ALABAMA AUTOMOTIVE FACTS

By GAIL ALLYN SHORT

HONDA ALABAMA

- ▶ Lincoln, Talladega County
- ▶ 4,500+ workers
- ▶ Capacity for 340,000 autos per year
- ▶ Capacity for 340,000 V-6 engines per year
- ▶ 18 supplier firms in Alabama
- ▶ Models:
 - Ridgeline pickup truck
 - Honda Passport
 - Honda Pilot
 - Honda Odyssey
- ▶ Shipped to 65 countries
- ▶ All four models ranked in Top 20 of Cars.com 2025 American Made Index
- ▶ More than 7 million cars produced since 2001
- ▶ Honda has invested \$3 billion to date
- ▶ \$472 million expansion announced in 2026
- ▶ Comment from Lamar Whittaker, vice president and plant lead: *"As Honda's largest light truck manufacturing facility in the world, our four models continue to resonate with our customers around the globe. I'm excited and I look forward to seeing what our team of world-class associates will do next."*

Alabama automaking rolls on

BY NANCY RANDALL

Alabama has been putting wheels on the ground since the 1990s. In 2024, Alabama's automotive industry built 1.1 million vehicles and 1.8 million engines, driving a more than 3% increase in jobs over 2023, according to the Alabama Automotive Manufacturers Association. That effort accelerated a nearly \$11 billion export value, the AAMA notes.

Automotive manufacturers must balance market demand, supply chain issues and workforce needs, all while focused on profitability. So how is Alabama's auto manufacturing industry holding up against these challenges? And what sets it apart from other states?

Industry experts Ron Davis and Tom Shoupe offer their views. Davis is president of the AAMA and a former executive at General Motors, Federal-Mogul

Powertrain and ZF. Shoupe, a former executive with Honda, is now an industry adviser to the AAMA.

On the competitive front, Alabama has several things going for it, Shoupe says: a solid foundation in auto manufacturing; an established supply chain to support that industry; and a collaborative environment focused on tackling shared challenges. Currently, Alabama has five original equipment manufacturers, or OEMs — Honda, Hyundai, Mazda, Toyota, Mercedes-Benz and Toyota — along with almost 180 suppliers.

"Never underestimate the strength of the foundation that's been built here" is a point often voiced by Shoupe when he

talks to various groups. "That is a great advantage. Part of that is having the track record of being able to do the work and to do it at a high level." Alabama's auto plants have shown that they can meet manufacturers' requirements for volume, quality and costs, he explains, all contributors to long-term growth.

The development of a supply base in Alabama and the South generally is also key to manufacturing growth, Shoupe notes. Different regions where OEMs operate may share suppliers, with the South "a major contributor to that stability," he adds.

ABOVE: An Alabama Auto Plant associate installs the new heavy-duty recovery hooks on the 2026 Honda Passport Trailsport. Photo courtesy of Honda.

HYUNDAI MOTOR MANUFACTURING ALABAMA

- ▶ Montgomery, Montgomery County
- ▶ 4,200+ workers
- ▶ One of two Hyundai plants in US
- ▶ Opened in 2005
- ▶ \$3.3 billion invested in plant today
- ▶ Assembled 362,000 vehicles in 2025
- ▶ Models include:
 - Tucson
 - Santa Fe
 - Santa Cruz
 - GV 70
- ▶ Comments from Public Relations Manager Scott Posey: *"Along with our projected production of 358,000 vehicles, 2026 will also be a year of preparation for the launch of five new vehicles in 2027, including an all newly designed Tucson and Tucson Hybrid," Posey says. "The launches will begin in the first quarter of 2027 and proceed over a period of six months."*

Davis notes that OEMs have made "a huge commitment" to further localize their supply bases. Evidence of the growth announced at the 2025 Southern Automotive Conference, SAC for short, in Huntsville:

MOBIS Alabama, the largest Tier 1 supplier to Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama and Kia Motor Manufacturing Georgia, is investing \$52 million in its Montgomery facility.

Daewon America, which makes suspension bars and coils for the automotive industry (Hyundai, Kia and others), is investing more than \$46 million in its Opelika plant.

Samkee Corp., based in South Korea, invested \$128 million to build its first U.S. factory in Tuskegee. It will serve as a Tier 1 supplier to Hyundai's assembly plant in Montgomery and is expected to bring more than 170 jobs to the state.

Another plus for Alabama's auto industry is its willingness to collaborate with each other for the public good, Shoupe says. "People are more than willing to pitch in with ideas and suggestions. And they're willing to get on committees to

Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama makes the Santa Fe Hybrid and other vehicles. Photo courtesy of Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama.

help solve problems that are collective problems," he explains.

He credits Davis' leadership and the AAMA with spearheading this collaborative approach to Alabama's auto industry, but notes that the group's influence extends to the entire Southeast region.

Workforce development is an example of this collaborative spirit, so much so that it took up much of the agenda at the SAC. The annual conference attracts attendees from across the country, with participants from OEMs, suppliers and more. The AAMA hosted the Huntsville event.

To develop workforce solutions for the industry, the association is working with local and state government agencies, manufacturers, educational institutions and employment firms, Shoupe says. To attract new employees and keep current ones, discussions have focused on practical solutions like adding on-site daycare to work sites to ease employees' childcare worries.

MAZDA TOYOTA MANUFACTURING USA

- ▶ Madison, Limestone County
- ▶ About 4,500 workers
- ▶ Opened in 2021
- ▶ More than 750,000 vehicles produced, with 1 millionth expected in 2026
- ▶ Models:
 - Mazda CX-50
 - Toyota Corolla Cross
- ▶ Supplier firms employ another 3,000 workers
- ▶ Comment from Rhonda Gilyard, vice president of administration: *"Of all the milestones MTM reached in 2025, we are proudest of the culture we have created with our team members. Our team members are our greatest asset."*



To that end, Toyota Motor is opening a new childcare center this year adjacent to its plant in Huntsville, according to President Marc Perry, speaking during the AAMA's Annual Appreciation Dinner in November 2025. The facility will care for more than 270 children across two shifts, Perry says.

Another vexing issue is how to shore

An inside view of the production line at Mazda Toyota Manufacturing. Photo courtesy of Mazda Toyota Manufacturing.

up fundamental skills like reading, writing and math for those wishing to land a core job (i.e., those actually building the car) in the auto industry, Shoupe notes. In addition, workforce participation skills

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1.2 million and growing
- Strong industry sectors
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metalworking, food processing,
and aerospace
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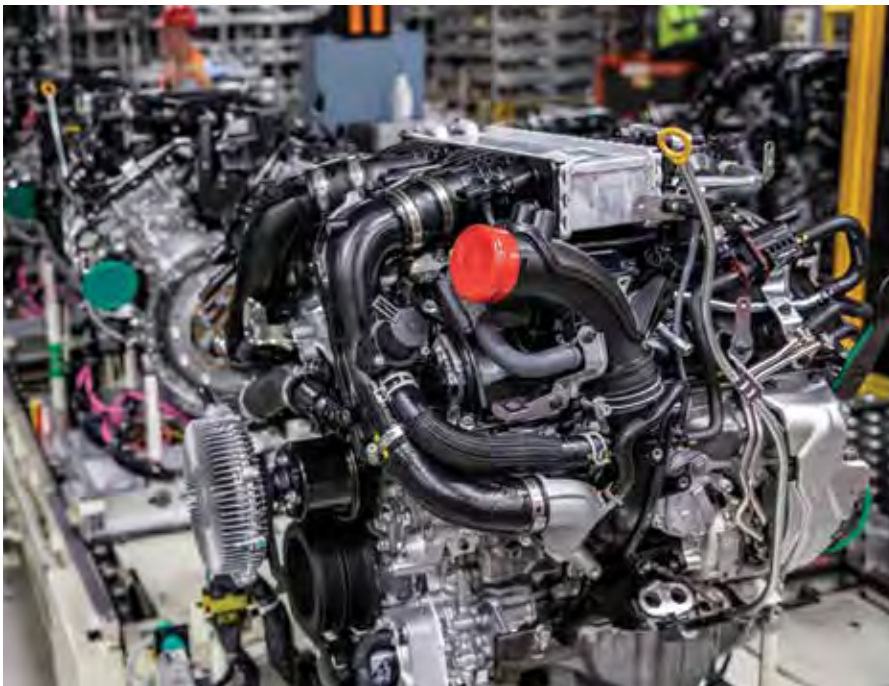
MERCEDES-BENZ U.S. INTERNATIONAL

- ▶ Vance, Tuscaloosa County
- ▶ Opened in 1997
- ▶ Investment:
 - Car plant — \$6 billion +
 - Battery plant (Bibb County) — \$1 billion +
- ▶ Models produced
 - GLE
 - GLS
 - GLE Coupe
 - Mercedes-Maybach GLS
 - EQE SUV
 - EQS SUV
 - Mercedes-Maybach EQS SUV

TOYOTA MOTOR MANUFACTURING ALABAMA INC.

- ▶ Huntsville, Madison County
- ▶ Opened in 2003
- ▶ 2025 production exceeded 1 million engines and differentials including
 - 4-cylinder
 - HEV
 - 2.4L Turbo
 - V-6
 - Differentials for Tacoma, Tundra and Sequoia
- ▶ \$1.7 billion total investment

This story originally appeared in the March 2026 issue of Business Alabama.



like work ethic, responsibility, reliable attendance and the ability to think and learn are also key focus areas for OEMs, he says.

“I think most OEMs [will say], if you can give me people that can come to work regularly and they want to think and learn, we can teach them what they need to know,” Shoupe explains. “We can make them into a welder. We can make them into whatever we need them to be. But it’s not possible without having [those] basic fundamental requirements.”

Toyota is supporting fundamental skills important to the auto-making industry as it announced last year. It has

TOP: The Mercedes-Benz Maybach EQS SUV. Photo courtesy of Mercedes-Benz. BOTTOM: Workers at Toyota assemble differentials and engines at the Huntsville manufacturing plant. Photo courtesy of Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama.

pledged STEM education grants up to \$11 million for Huntsville City Schools, Perry says. Through its Driving Possibilities initiative, Toyota will help prepare pre-K-12 students for future careers in science, technology, engineering and math. The program will be implemented over five years in select schools, according to Toyota.

In addition, Alabama has invested in next-generation skills training with construction of the new EV Technology Center at Alabama Robotics Technology Park in Tanner, near Decatur, notes the AAMA. The center will help ready Alabama’s automotive workforce for a rapidly changing industry.

Tariffs, transition and trends

Along with building a skilled workforce, OEMs must keep tariffs top of mind to stay competitive, no small feat with the Trump administration’s policies in flux.



Tariffs can compel OEMs to review their production lineups and make adjustments if needed, Shoupe explains. They must decide the best location to build their models given the tariff situation, especially among Canada, the United States and Mexico, he says. “There are so many supplies that are dispersed among those three countries.”

OEMs also must pay attention to the effect of tariffs on equipment and tooling, which are often being upgraded, he says.

The key point, Shoupe explains, is for OEMs to keep track of tariff changes so that they can have “more certainty in planning.”

OEMs also are in a product transition phase, say Shoupe and Davis. They are reworking their strategies and product lineups given the shift in the electric vehicle market and EV sales, Shoupe explains.

General Motors, for example, reported that in fourth quarter 2025, its EV sales fell 43%, to 25,219 vehicles. “If you look at GM and Ford, they’re taking these huge charges to offset the EV business. And they’re having to recover that somehow,” Shoupe says, with cost competitiveness and profitability the major concerns.

The market’s shift away from EVs is propelling makers overall, not just in the Southeast, to consider other powertrain options like hybrids and combustion engines, he notes. The EV market isn’t dead, but it will require improvements in infrastructure and other aspects of the EV supply chain, Shoupe predicts.

Another manufacturing trend, says Davis, is improving the efficiency of powertrains using turbo technology.

Whatever the technology — the use of robots, more computer-controlled equipment and the rise of AI — automakers will need a highly trained workforce, Shoupe notes, especially with OEMs announcing additional investments.

“The most important thing is, they’re all totally committed to the Southeast region and North American production and the growth of that.”

With its three decades of experience, Alabama’s auto-making industry is geared up for the next mile and beyond.

This story originally appeared in the March 2026 issue of Business Alabama.

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Booming Biotech

FROM ROOTS IN BIRMINGHAM, BIOTECH HAS GROWN ACROSS THE STATE

BY NEDRA BLOOM



Alabama's role in the world of biotechnology has been growing steadily.

From roots at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and its partner Southern Research have sprung seven anti-cancer drugs now in use and another dozen in various stages of the approval process.

Now UAB has invested \$76 million in a facility for biomedical research and psychology. The new facility will feature wet and dry research labs and research support space.

"Interdisciplinary collaboration is a longtime strength and hallmark of UAB. State-of-the-art facilities like this advance the aims of our strategic plan, Forging the Future, and make UAB more competitive globally and bring better health and quality of life to the people of Alabama and beyond," said UAB President Ray Watts.

In 2025, Southern Research opened its new \$98 million research facility, doubling its lab capacity and supporting its search for ways to combat chronic illnesses, cancer and infectious diseases. "Southern Research and the University of Alabama at Birmingham continue to partner in groundbreaking discoveries that impact lives throughout Alabama

Southern Research's new facility.

and beyond," said Watts, who is also serving as interim CEO of Southern Research.

Aiding these and other biotech projects, the state has kicked off a new program to train biotech workers. "We are leaving no stone unturned in developing our workforce to meet and exceed industry demands in Alabama," said Gov. Kay Ivey. "Bioscience has grown to be one of our state's premier industries, and we have numerous firms like HudsonAlpha and Southern Research making groundbreaking advancements daily."

Down south at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute in Mobile, drug discovery and patient care share one facility, reassuring patients that their illness is of concern to scientists and reminding scientists of the people who are relying on them.

Up north in Huntsville is HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, at the forefront of genomic medicine and also leading the way in applying bioscience advances to the critical world of crop production. In fact, HudsonAlpha has opened a new facility in Dothan with a special focus on agriculture issues, looking for ways "to improve plants used for food, feed, fuel and fiber."

BIOTECH BY THE NUMBERS

- ▶ 780 bioscience companies
- ▶ 50 medical device companies
- ▶ \$7.3 billion annual economic impact
- ▶ 18,000 bioscience workers
- ▶ \$400+ million in private funding in five years
- ▶ 576 bioscience patents awarded 2016-2019
- ▶ 7 FDA-approved anti-cancer drugs discovered at Southern Research
- ▶ 12 more drugs in approval pipeline

INFOTECH BY THE NUMBERS

- ▶ Alabama's tech output has grown 50% since 2018
- ▶ \$321 million in IT venture capital deals in 2023
- ▶ \$2.4 billion in data center investments have been announced
- ▶ Google plans to invest \$1.5 billion more in northeast Alabama data center
- ▶ Meta increased investment in Montgomery data center to \$1.5 billion in 2025
- ▶ 2,500 IT professionals work at Maxwell AFB Gunter Complex
- ▶ Key players include Meta, Google, DC Blox, Shipt, Fleetio, Aubis, Daxko, Provalis, Atlas RFID, CGI, McLeod Software

KEY CONTRIBUTORS

- ▶ Cummings Research Park in Huntsville is nation's second-largest research park
- ▶ DHS and the Secret Service operate the National Computer Forensics Institute in Hoover
- ▶ HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology in Huntsville is a national leader in genetic research
- ▶ Southern Research in Birmingham is a pacesetter in biotech research
- ▶ University of Alabama at Birmingham ranks in top 1% for NIH funding

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FROM MUSKEGON TO MOBILE: HOW CONTINENTAL SOARED INTO A GLOBAL POWERHOUSE

BY STEVEN CASTLE — PHOTOS BY MIKE KITTRELL

Very few aviation companies can boast 120 years of experience in the industry, especially since the Wright brothers only made their first flight 122 years ago. But Continental Aerospace Technologies, nestled in Mobile, can do just that, and much more.

Continental's story began in Muskegon, Michigan, as Continental Motors. For more than half a century, Continental produced traditional piston-based engines for lighter personal aircraft, or "general aviation."

In the late 1940s, the end of World War II saw the rapid expansion of the light airplane industry, and Continental grew with it. Continental continued to innovate, introducing general aviation to turbocharging and fuel injection in the early 1960s.

In 1964, Jerrie Mock completed the

first solo flight around the world by a woman, a tremendous feat accomplished in a Cessna 180 aircraft powered by a Continental engine.

Continental's demand eventually outpaced its capacity. The company needed a new home, and in 1966, they found one right here in Alabama.

"We outgrew Muskegon," says Karen Hong, Continental's global CEO and president. "The story we're told is [Brookley Air Force Base] closed down here and literally, we moved in the next day."

In Hong's view, Mobile was definitely the right place to relocate: "I think they made a good choice to anchor over here, because of the labor pool and the state and local leaders' support." Mobile's port made it easy to move products and materials, and Alabama's warm climate prevented the kind of costly cold weather delays that could vex northern cities.

Mobile's 11-building complex provided Continental with room for decades of operational expansion.

In 1999, Continental unveiled its innovative FADEC-equipped engine, or Fully Authorized Digital Engine Control. FADEC is a computer-guided engine control unit that elegantly combines throttle, prop and fuel mixture into a single control, providing optimal fuel efficiency at any altitude and thrust, while taking the mental burden off of pilots. Or, as Hong more pragmatically puts it: "You push one button, you relax, and you can talk."

That convenience is no accident, as the pilot experience is a big part of Continental's focus. For Continental's

Continental's global headquarters is part of a major aviation cluster at the Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley.



Carole Peterman (left), a quality team member, and Karen Hong, president and CEO of Continental Aerospace Technologies, carefully examine a crankshaft ahead of the engine assembly process.

employees and leadership, the versatility and freedom of general aviation is paramount.

“Once you discover Continental and the pride that the team members have and the love that we have for general aviation, we just want to share it with more people,” says Continental’s Marketing Director Andrea Bertagnolli. “Our industry is such a passion-driven industry. For some, they use [Continental planes] as a hobby on a weekend to be able to fly to an Alabama football game while others use it to travel to four cities in a day for business.”

Continental continued to grow in 2011, when it was acquired by a subsidiary of AVIC International, headquartered in Beijing, China. [Continental transitioned back to U.S. ownership in 2026.] Access to larger supply chains and customer bases gave Continental the ability to spread its wings and become a true global competitor. Today, Continental supports customers in 78 countries from its three global offices: its headquarters in Mobile; a service and maintenance facility across Mobile Bay in Fairhope; and a major manufacturing facility for its Jet-A engine in St. Egidien, Germany.

While the 11-building complex in Mobile provided Continental with the room it needed to grow, it also had some downsides, specifically in efficiency: parts would have to be transported from building to building by hand or driven in carts for continued assembly,

and employees in one building had little contact with employees in other buildings.

Eventually, Continental realized another change was needed: moving its global headquarters into one large facility. “And so again, we were trying to choose a new site. Where would we put our new global headquarters?” says Bertagnolli. “Were we going to move? What were we going to do? Obviously, there were other incentives from other local governments and things like that.”

But in the end, she says, the decision wasn’t a difficult one: “These people [of Mobile] are what make our engines and we’re nothing without them. So, for us, it was an easy decision to just move across the fence.”

And Continental did just that in 2018, building a new cutting-edge global headquarters and manufacturing facility just across the fence line from its previous location. The new 275,000-square-foot facility is a monument to efficiency, where cast and molded metal hunks, or ingots, start at one end of a huge indoor manufacturing floor, and slowly make their way from station to station, being heated, cooled, chipped away, milled, measured, plated, processed and assembled, until they reach the opposite end of the manufacturing floor as precisely engineered parts, or even fully assembled engines, ready to ship to customers.

Teams also communicate and relate with each other much more easily. Many

teams hold open-air stand-up meetings right on the plant floor, and office workers who were once partitioned away in separate buildings — departments like human resources, sales support, housekeeping, corporate leadership and others — now work in open-design office spaces, which overlook the manufacturing floor through a near-continuous row of large windows.

Every detail of the building — from its company’s 120-year timeline proudly touted on the walls of its lobby to the vertical banners at each manufacturing station, adroitly detailing the part that is being built there and its purpose in the engine — works to foster collaboration and company cohesion.

And that focus on people permeates Continental through to its development programs. “We have a Cornerstone people development system and also Continental Aerospace Technology Academy,” says Hong. “We can provide not only theory, but also hands-on opportunities.”

This academy, filled with classroom staples like desks and whiteboards as well as fully and partially assembled engines hoisted on stands, welcomes technicians and engineers from all over the world to train on maintaining Continental engines.

And Continental nurtures its employees’ love of general aviation with its Flying Club, a small stable of light aircraft for use by employees with enough tenure.

With that focus on connection, it’s no wonder many Continental employees are either private pilots or student pilots, including both Hong and Bertagnolli.

“It’s one of the most affordable ways that you can get your private pilot or further on training licenses,” says Bertagnolli. “The more that we can fly and spend time connected to our product and see what our customers are experiencing, it just helps make that customer connection.”

This story originally appeared in the October 2025 issue of Business Alabama.

SPACE COMMAND FINDS SWEET HOME IN HUNTSVILLE

BY KATHERINE MacGILVRAY



In September 2025, President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. Space Command headquarters will relocate from Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado Springs to Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville.

Since 2019, Redstone had been among six sites under consideration for Space Command headquarters, and in 2021 then-Secretary of the Air Force Barbara Barrett stated that Redstone was the preferred site based on five factors: mission, infrastructure capacity, community support, costs to the Department of War and mission impacts to full operational capacity.

A timeline to relocate was set at six years, and despite some back-and-forth in recent years — in 2023, President Joe Biden announced headquarters would remain in Colorado — Space Command will join NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command and the Missile Defense Agency in calling Redstone Arsenal, and Huntsville, "home."

Space Command — not to be confused with Space Force, a military service



branch — was officially established as the 11th combatant command on Aug. 29, 2019, by Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper at the direction of President Trump. It actively employs joint forces from the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force and Space Force and is responsible for delivering space capabilities to joint and combined forces, as well as defending the space domain. In addition to military members, Space Command consists of civilian employees and contractor personnel.

For Chip Cherry, president and CEO of the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce, landing Space Command is a testament to Huntsville's history of adaptability.

"If you think back to where we were prior to the Space Race, we were the watercress capital of the world and home

to a champion milk cow," he says, referring to Lily Flagg, a Jersey cow renowned for being the top butter producer in the world in 1892 and appearing at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893.

"So, we go from that agrarian-based economy to the tip of the spear as we respond to Russia's launch of the first satellite, and then the national effort to take man to the moon and soon, hopefully, the first woman and person of color. The community has been very resilient and willing to engage in new opportunities."

He adds, "I would do a significant tip of the hat to our federal legislative delegation, coupled with local and state folks, for not letting the political process override an objective review. We were selected as a preferred site in the first round, and a lot of that had to do with some unique attributes of Redstone. It's a very large installation and has a lot of developable land."

Redstone Arsenal is a Federal Center of Excellence and one of the country's most significant defense campuses. Originally established as a U.S. Army installation in 1941, Redstone became a hub for the



Army's rocket and missile programs after World War II and has since grown to support more than 75 tenant organizations.

Approximately 1,700 personnel are directly assigned to the Space Command headquarters in Colorado. Huntsville city officials say they are expecting roughly 1,400 employees to transition to the new headquarters over the next five years, a manageable number and timeline, especially considering the Arsenal already supports a daily workforce of roughly 45,000 people.

Additionally, the Huntsville metropolitan area has a proven track record for recruiting and landing major employers, such as the Mazda Toyota Manufacturing plant that started production in 2021 and supports 4,000 employees, or, more comparably, the FBI expanding its presence on the Arsenal.

"This isn't our first rodeo," says Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle. "When the Army Materiel Command, Army Aviation Command and the FBI expanded here, we worked closely with our partners to ensure employees and their families felt welcomed and supported."

That includes offering a variety of housing options, Battle adds, and the city is working with Redstone to establish

additional on-post military housing as well as working alongside business and community partners to help families get settled.

"From relocation support and school information to housing and local tours, we want new families to see why Huntsville is such an easy place to call home."

Redstone Arsenal already has set aside office space for an advance team, and plans are underway to build a temporary operations facility consisting of a 450,000-square-foot campus with three 150,000-square-foot buildings. A roughly 60-acre site near the center of the Arsenal also has been identified for a 427,000-square-foot permanent facility that will eventually house all Space Command personnel.

"We've been preparing for this moment for years," says Battle. "When we first competed for Space Command, we began planning for what its relocation would mean for our workforce, infrastructure and community resources. That work never stopped."

In addition, Battle says the city is working with the state on long-term plans for upgrades to key corridors, including the Memorial Parkway overpass at I-565, completing the Northern Bypass and improvements to

Downtown Huntsville. *Photo courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Convention & Visitors Bureau.*

Highway 72. Other investments include Resolute Way, which will connect I-565 to Gate 9 at the Arsenal, and the East Arsenal access road, which will connect I-565 to a proposed Redstone gate near Triana Boulevard.

"These are all in our transportation pipeline to support the region's next decade of growth," Battle says.

With the groundwork laid for a smooth transition, it's now just a matter of looking forward.

"We're excited and honored to be in this space, to be part of the national infrastructure, to be able to defend the nation," says Cherry.

"It brings high-level expertise, creates new opportunities for our workforce, and serves as a center of excellence that attracts even more talent and innovation," says Battle.

"Each job connected to Space Command is a job multiplier, which makes this an exciting moment for the city of Huntsville."

This story originally appeared in the December 2025 issue of Business Alabama.

WHERE THE WILD THINGS (STILL) ARE

BY JOSHUA GIVENS

The morning light spills across Flagg Mountain in Coosa County, revealing the southernmost reaches of the Appalachians rolling toward a breathtaking horizon. A few hours to the south, paddlers slip quietly through the Mobile-Tensaw Delta beneath towering cypress trees while osprey circle overhead.

Between those two landscapes lie hardwood forests, winding rivers, whitewater rapids, nationally recognized bike trails, sprawling wildlife refuges and thousands of miles of adventure and terrain that continue to surprise even lifelong Alabamians.

You see, that's the paradox of Alabama.

For generations, the state has been known for college football, civil rights history, small-town southern hospitality and Gulf Coast beaches. Yet one of its greatest assets has often gone overlooked — an astonishing variety of outdoor experiences packed into a single state.

“There are not many states that can say they have the Appalachian Mountains and the Gulf Coast,” says Paul DeMarco, president of the Alabama Trails Foundation. “The uniqueness of our topography is what draws so many outdoor recreation enthusiasts to our state.”

That diversity has become far more than a point of state pride. Increasingly, it has served as an economic advantage.

Across Alabama, communities are investing in trails, parks, waterways and public spaces that attract visitors, support local businesses and improve quality of life for residents. Outdoor recreation has become a progressively important piece



Bikers take to the trails at Chewacla State Park in Auburn. Photo by Billy Pope/
Courtesy of Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association.



TOP: Whitewater rafting on the Chattahoochee River. Photo by Ethan Honaker. BOTTOM: A waterfall at Chewacla State Park. All photos courtesy of Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association.



of the state's tourism economy — and a growing factor in recruiting both new industries and the workforce that follows them.

"Tourism is economic development," says Pam Swanner, executive director of the Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association. "Not only is it a strong economic development tool, but it also complements the recruitment of industry because we provide these recreational opportunities."

Interest in the outdoors surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, but unlike many temporary trends and short-lived fads, this one hasn't subsided or vanished.

"That interest in outdoor recreation has never waned," Swanner says. "It has continued to grow every year."

For many visitors, Alabama's greatest surprise is simply the breadth of what

is available. Travelers expecting gentle rolling hills instead discover rugged mountain terrain in the north. Hikers can spend days exploring the Sipsey Wilderness inside Bankhead National Forest or begin the legendary Pinhoti Trail at Flagg Mountain, where the Appalachian foothills start their long journey toward Maine.

Farther east, cyclists have helped transform communities along the Chief Ladiga Trail into emerging "trail towns." Mountain bikers travel from across the country to ride Coldwater Mountain near Anniston, while Oak Mountain State Park and Chewacla State Park continue expanding their reputations as premier destinations for riders of every skill level.

"You don't have to go up to the heart of the Appalachians or the Rockies to really hike some rugged terrain,"

DeMarco says. "There's plenty of it right here."

As the landscape changes moving south, so do the experiences. The rivers of the Black Belt become a playground for anglers, canoeists and kayakers. Bird-watchers arrive from around the country to explore one of North America's richest ecological regions. Lake Eufaula, long known as the Bass Capital of the World, draws serious fishermen, while the Alabama Scenic River Trail links waterways across much of the state for paddlers looking to experience Alabama from a different perspective.

For Swanner, the Black Belt tells a different story than simply outdoor recreation.

"We have something for everybody," she says. "I mean, there's something for the naturalist. We've got Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge. There's just so much to appeal and to promote to the outside folks that have an interest in whatever it is. And for the thrill-seeker, we've got whitewater rafting in the Black Belt. We've got zip lining across from Alabama to Georgia and back, which is the only zip line in the nation that traverses two states."

Visitors may begin the day hiking at Perry Lakes or paddling the Alabama River before spending an afternoon with the internationally renowned Gee's Bend Quilters, browsing Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center in Camden or enjoying southern cooking in one of the region's historic downtowns.

Outdoor recreation, she says, has become the front door to discovering the culture, history, heritage and hospitality that define the region. The same philosophy is reshaping communities across Alabama. Rather than thinking of trails as isolated recreational amenities, cities now see them as investments that encourage tourism, support restaurants and lodging, improve public health and create places where families want to live.

DeMarco points to the growth of East Alabama's trail network as one example. The intersection of the Pinhoti Trail,

An angler on Alabama water. Photo courtesy of Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association.

Chief Ladiga Trail, Coldwater Mountain and nearby Cheaha State Park has helped establish the region as one of the Southeast's emerging outdoor recreation hubs.

Meanwhile, destinations such as Red Mountain Park and Moss Rock Preserve demonstrate that residents don't have to travel hours into the wilderness to reconnect with nature. Some of Alabama's most rewarding outdoor experiences exist only minutes from thriving metropolitan areas.

"You don't have to be a backpacker with an 80-pound pack," DeMarco says. "There are so many trails you can enjoy without having to think you have to camp."

That accessibility may prove just as important as Alabama's geography.

Families looking for an afternoon hike, retirees exploring a scenic greenway, cyclists planning a weekend ride and paddlers renting kayaks for the first time all

contribute to an outdoor economy that extends well beyond state parks.

Swanner has watched that transformation firsthand. An economic impact study commissioned by Alabama Black Belt Adventures found tourism in the region growing from \$1.3 billion to \$3.8 billion in economic impact over several years, reflecting increased visitation and growing interest in outdoor experiences.

The numbers reinforce something both Swanner and DeMarco see every day — Alabama's outdoors are no longer a hid-

den gem known only to hunters, anglers and experienced hikers.

They are rapidly becoming part of the state's identity.

From the waterfalls of the Appalachian foothills to the quiet waters of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, Alabama offers something increasingly rare — a chance to experience remarkable natural diversity close to home.

This story originally appeared in the August 2026 issue of Business Alabama.





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Colleges and Universities



Higher education in Alabama offers students many pathways to a successful future. The University of Alabama System is educating some 70,000 students, providing health care for some 2 million patients and is the state's largest employer with more than 40,000 workers across the system.

All three academic institutions in the system — the University of Alabama, the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the University of Alabama in Huntsville — are regarded as key research universities.

Auburn University is the state's original land grant institution, now offering particular expertise in pharmacy, veterinary medicine, engineering and more.

BY THE NUMBERS

- ▶ 14 public universities
- ▶ 12 independent colleges & universities
- ▶ 24 community & technical colleges

BIGGEST PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Universities

- ▶ University of Alabama, with 42,360 students
- ▶ Auburn University, with 35,172 students
- ▶ University of Alabama at Birmingham, with 20,876 students

Community Colleges

- ▶ Jefferson State Community College, with 10,195 students
- ▶ Calhoun Community College, with 10,012 students
- ▶ Coastal Alabama Community College, with 8,736 students

AIDT WORKFORCE TRAINING

- ▶ More than 1 million job seekers trained
- ▶ More than 5,000 companies assisted

TOP: University of Alabama; MIDDLE: University of Alabama at Birmingham; BOTTOM: Auburn University.

The state also has major public universities in Florence, Athens, Huntsville, Jacksonville, Normal, Livingston, Troy, Montgomery, Mobile and a specialty university in Montevallo known for its small-college feel.

Complementing the public universities are a collection of 12 private colleges and universities and 24 community and technical colleges.

Off campus, the state's highly regarded AIDT works directly with business and industry helping recruit and train workers with curriculum tailored to the company's specific needs.

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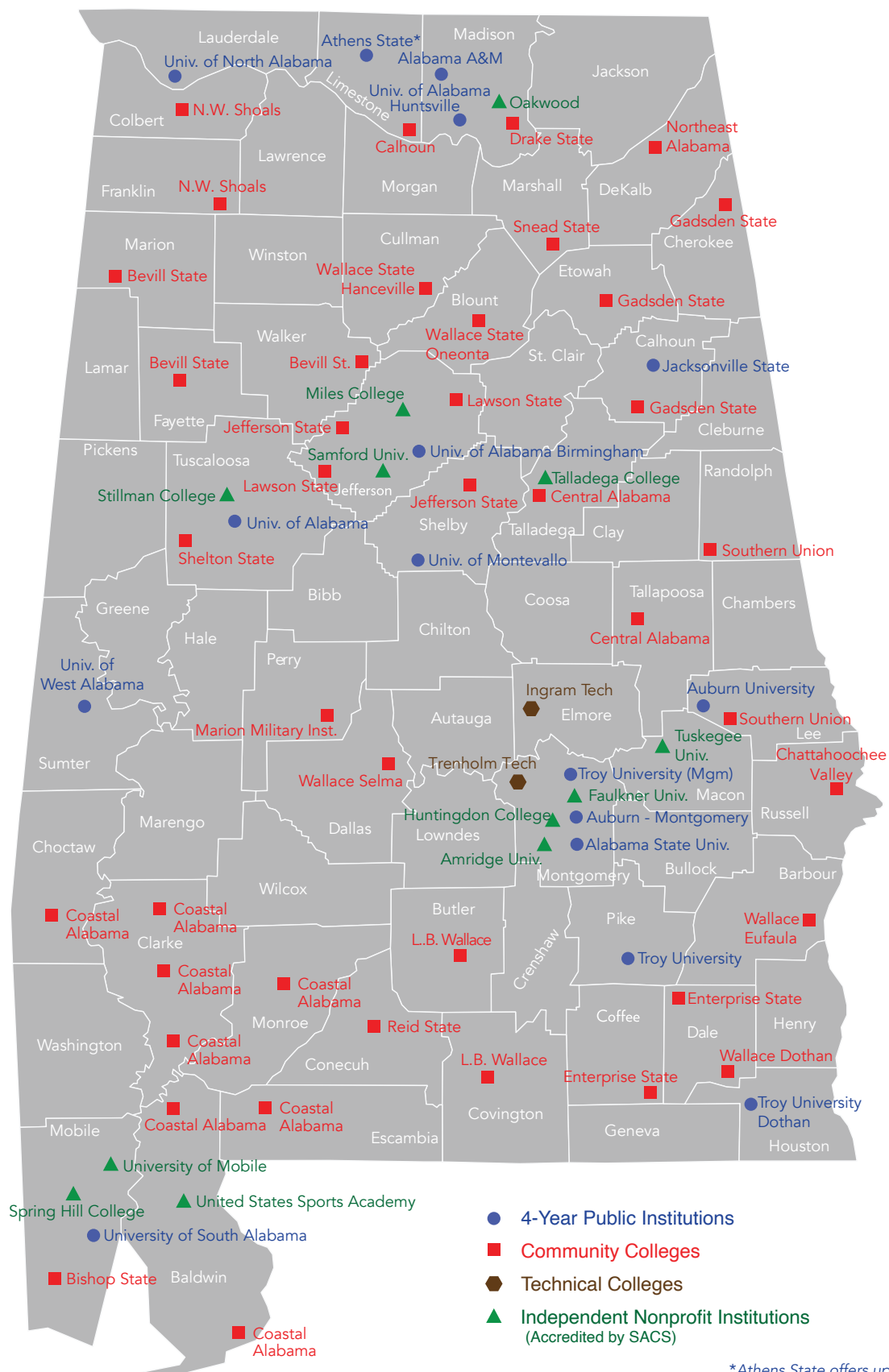
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CATALOG



Alabama Colleges and Universities



*Athens State offers upper division programs only.

PREPARATION FOR CAREERS NEAR AND FAR

BY JIM HANNAFORD

Preparing tomorrow's foresters is just one of many hands-on training programs offered by Alabama's community colleges. Photo courtesy of Lurleen B. Wallace Community College.



Identifying trees is a primary skill for would-be foresters. Photos courtesy of Lurleen B. Wallace Community College.

Community colleges, by definition, serve the communities where they are located. One of the effective ways they do it in Alabama is through programs that offer lots of hands-on training to prepare students for specific jobs in their areas that need workers.

To get their feet in the door, so to speak, basic skills and practical knowledge will give them a leg up on other applicants. Judging from their extremely high placement rates, some of the workforce training programs are doing quite a commendable job of preparing students for important industries across the state. We'll take a close look at three programs — forestry, marine technology and the culinary arts



“There is a national forest within 15 minutes of us, there’s a state park within 10 minutes of us, there’s the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center within 20 minutes of us, and there are innumerable landowners who support the program and allow access for educational purposes.”

— Russell Stringer,
Lurleen B. Wallace Community
College in Andalusia

— in which students develop real-world experience rather than relying solely on books, lectures and online resources.

Forestry and wildlife sciences

Lurleen B. Wallace Community College in Andalusia offers the system’s only forestry program, and there’s a certain kind of person that’s drawn to it. Their instructor, Russell Stringer, could easily be describing himself when he relates their traits. “It’s people who could not stand to work in a cubicle or an office building 40 hours a week, day in and day out,” he says. “They would claw the walls down if you tried to shut them inside all day.”

Having grown up in the same forest-rich area, he’s been around trees all of his life and was intrigued by them enough to make them a career. He came to

teaching less than three years ago after 30 years in the industry, including many years as the urban forester for the city of Montgomery. “It’s time for the younger folks to take over,” he says, “and I thought it might be a good idea to teach them what I know.”

The students who are following in his footsteps are on a path toward associate’s degrees to become forest technicians. Over five semesters they learn about growing and managing trees and identifying, measuring and evaluating timber. They also work with heavy equipment and earn certification in prescribed burns, logging and firefighting. Many focus on a growing sector of the industry, which is managing properties to attract certain wildlife to make hunting more productive.

The students spend about half their time in the classrooms before heading outside, where they feel more comfortable. “There is a national forest within 15 minutes of us, there’s a state park within 10 minutes of us, there’s the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center within 20 minutes of us,” Stringer says,

“and there are innumerable landowners who support the program and allow access for educational purposes.”

Advisory committees at LBW Community College help to guide the curricula for technical programs such as this one, and Stringer notes that some of the industry professionals involved are also the ones who are regularly looking for employees.

He has a dependable measure of the program’s success: “I go by how many times my phone rings and it’s somebody in the forestry industry asking, ‘Do you have anybody good that’s about to graduate?’ I’ve got more people calling me than I’ve got students,” Stringer says. “A student that’s willing to work can go to work in just a couple of weeks somewhere doing something forestry related. And really and truly,” he adds, “a student that’s in the forestry program is not afraid to work. Most of them, by the time they graduate, have interned somewhere, and the companies they’ve interned with are just waiting for them to graduate so they can put them on full time.”

COASTAL ALABAMA

**TRAINING
ALABAMA'S WORKFORCE
SINCE 1965!**



TOP: Close to the Gulf, there's a high demand for workers who can maintain boats — Coastal Alabama helps train those workers. Photo by Jim Hannaford.

LEFT: Most of the students in Coastal Alabama's marine technician program are earning college credits while still in high school. Photo by Jim Hannaford.

Marine technology

The closer you get to the Gulf waters, the more boats you'll see, and someone has to keep them running. Many of these marine technicians are learning the ropes at Coastal Alabama Community College, which operates out of 12 locations in Alabama's southernmost counties.

Rather than a two-year degree, students earn a short-term certificate by attending classes that are held in a warehouse-style building in Foley that's owned by Baldwin County Public Schools. Inside is a small classroom and a nicely equipped shop that contains the numerous boats, motors and accessories they use for training.

Most of the students, but not all, are juniors and seniors at area high



schools who attend under the Alabama Community College System's dual enrollment provisions. "We knew when we started the program in 2002 that there were probably a limited number of adults who were looking to do this in a change-of-career scenario," says Josh Duplantis, Coastal Alabama's dean of workforce and economic development. "We kind of grow our own with this program, and they earn college credits for these courses while they're still in high school."

Grants helped to launch the course, and an early assist from Yamaha Motor Company put it in motion. "They really stepped up," says Duplantis. "They advised us on what equipment we needed to get this thing started and they offered us a curriculum. We have the same arrangement with Mercury, but that came later."

Instructor William Montgomery is a Birmingham native with a lifetime love of boats. He sees the program as a stepping stone into the same field that lured him from his earlier background in marine biology about 15 years ago.

"It's an entry-level program, so we're teaching the basic hands-on theories on

how to do maintenance on an outboard — changing oil, water pumps and spark plugs, how to do simple diagnostics," he says. They also learn to install electronic devices such as GPS units, fishfinders and chartplotters. He stresses to his students the importance of "thinking in a problem-solving way, so that when something isn't working, they can learn how to troubleshoot it."

The basic concepts are the same regardless of the size of a vessel, but field trips to supportive businesses such as Grander Marine in Orange Beach, Saunders Yacht Works in Gulf Shores and Sportsman's Marine in Fairhope help students get a better feel for what they'll encounter beyond their basic training.

"Boats have gotten exponentially bigger and more complicated," says Montgomery. "It's going to be very common for them to be at a marina and have a 35-foot boat with triple engines and cabins and air conditioning and generators and a huge amount of systems and electronics, lithium battery banks and converters, radars and all sorts of other stuff that goes along with having big engines."

While the need for marine techs

Students in the culinary program at Lawson State cook large quantities of food for luncheons and other special events.
Photo by Tiffany Garner.

is rising along with the population in coastal areas, Duplantis says they don't want to expand the program too much. "For us, it's a boutique program," he says. "We want to meet the market demand by training just enough of them that all of the jobs are filled."

Culinary arts

Many cooks would envy the amount of kitchen space and all the tools that culinary students have to work with at Lawson State Community College's main campus in Birmingham.

The culinary arts program has three separate commercial kitchens, one of them set up specifically for baking and another for prep work. The third one has the equipment they need to cook the big quantities of food they regularly provide for luncheons and other special events in the college's formal dining room. That's where guests can taste for themselves what the students have learned under the skilled direction of instructors Adam

Elliott and Darvin McDaniel.

The students, Elliott says, are a mix of young people with a new interest in cooking and others who are more seasoned cooks looking to expand their knowledge, perhaps wanting to move into management. They can learn a lot from Elliott, who is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York; worked for years in a variety of restaurants; and operated a successful catering business in Atlanta.

“They leave here and go to hotels, restaurants and catering,” says Elliott. “Some of our students are at Ross Bridge Marriott, which is one of the hotels owned by the Retirement Systems of Alabama, and some are at places such as Applebee’s, Logan’s Roadhouse, O. Henry’s Coffee, Saltgrass Steak House and Waffle House.”

Others have ventured into business for themselves with food trucks, which require additional abilities. “It’s similar to a restaurant but it’s on a smaller scale, and it’s kind of like running your own business,” says Elliott. “So, we do have courses in food purchasing and cost control along with the other culinary



“It feels great training our students for the industry. They are excited to start a career in food service and contribute their own skills and techniques for the job.”

— Adam Elliott,
Lawson State
Community College

courses, and those are very beneficial.”

Along with pro tips on slicing and dicing and expert guidance on topics

ranging from menu planning to butchery, students also learn valuable lessons that arguably rank higher than flavors and presentation. “One thing that’s especially important in terms of classroom instruction is food safety and sanitation,” Elliott says. “That includes proper food storage and temperature controls and cross-contamination prevention, which is teaching them about harmful bacteria and contaminants. Then they get their ServSafe certification, which is good for five years.”

While the forestry program and the marine tech program both report 100% job placement rates, Elliott is proud to say that between 75% and 85% of his graduates have been employed at the time of graduation since he started with the program in 2014. “It feels great training our students for the industry,” he says. “They are excited to start a career in food service and contribute their own skills and techniques for the job.”

This story originally appeared in the April 2026 issue of Business Alabama.

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READY TO PREP THE PLANES

BY DEBORAH STOREY — PHOTOS BY MIKE KITTRELL

Boeing estimates that more than 600,000 new maintenance technicians will be needed over the next 20 years to service the global commercial aviation fleet – 134,000 in North America alone.

The Alabama Community College System is doing its part. Before the fall semester began last year, more than 1,200 students already had enrolled in flight technology, aviation maintenance and aviation manufacturing programs at eight state community colleges.

The aerospace and aviation programs include advanced composites, aerospace welding, aircraft structural assembly, avionics, flight simulation, drone technology, robotics and more.

The courses train students in career paths certified by the Federal Aviation Administration and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Gillette Samms is director of aviation programs for the Alabama Community College System. In his lilting accent, he tells the interesting story of how he came to Alabama in the 1970s and ended up overseeing the community college program decades later.

“I’m originally from Jamaica,” Samms says. “My first trip on an airplane landed in Dothan, Alabama. That school was a magnetic draw not just nationwide, but there were a whole lot of foreign students there when I attended it.”

Jamaica did have its own airline, but he came to America for the best training available.

“I’ve always dreamed of doing aviation,” he says. “As with most young kids growing up, you aspire for an aviation career but realistically it was probably outside of my league financially and otherwise.”

Sponsorships were available in different professions at U.S. companies then, including the field of aviation mechanics.

“They were attracting folks from overseas to train in the U.S. and I responded to it,” he says. “I was lucky to be one of the candidates that got accepted and ended up in Ozark.”

Samms graduated in 1979 and worked

Gillette Samms works with a student at the Alabama Aviation Center at Coastal Alabama Community College.

at Dannelly Field in Montgomery for about a year, and later at Northrop Grumman. He earned his pilot's license, became a flight instructor, taught aviation tech for 28 years at Atlanta Technical College and later in Utah and North Carolina. He started an aviation program in Crestview, Florida, too.

Samms took over leadership of Alabama's training program about three years ago. The state already had deep roots in aviation — both military and space. The Wright Brothers opened the first civilian aviation school in Montgomery in 1910.

"Ozark is one of the most successful programs in the state," says Samms. "They're in the back door of Fort Rucker, or Fort Novosel, and they're sort of like a feeder for that whole operation down here for the U.S. Army."

The U.S. Army helicopter training center began in Ozark in 1971 and is one of the largest in the world.

"They hold the name Alabama Aviation College," he says.

"I actually worked there when I graduated," Samms says. "I spent about five years maintaining helicopters there. They're primarily helicopters but they do have fixed-wing aircraft as well, strictly military."

Depending on the program, the community college curriculum prepares graduates for the federal aviation mechanics test in two divisions. The airframe license deals with structural components, electrical equipment, landing gear and more. The power plant license pertains to engines.

"Avionics is essentially aircraft electronics," he says, including instrumentation, navigation, radios and communication.

"The technical skills that they gain is to make them qualify for the test for the FAA license," he says. "The license is basically the passport for getting into the profession."

Samms is working to expand avionics



offerings at community colleges across the state.

Because of attrition, retirement and expansion in the industry, there's a great need for pilots and maintenance personnel, he says.

Samms is based in south Alabama "because of the growing demand for Airbus and the training that Bishop State College is doing currently for Airbus," he says. He travels across the state to visit the various programs.

After general instruction, students study aircraft structure "where they do sheet metal structure, sheet metal repairs. They have to learn about the different

TOP: Coastal's Alabama Aviation Center is located close to Airbus, Continental and a host of other aviation industries in Mobile. BOTTOM: Students at the Alabama Aviation College in Ozark troubleshoot faults in an Aircraft De-Ice and Rain System Trainer. Photo courtesy of ACCS.

fasteners that are used, the application of these fasteners and different structural repairs on the aircraft. You don't just go out and grab some metal and just slap it on the side of the aircraft.

"They do things like basic electricity. They learn about fluid lines and fit-ins. They learn about hydraulics. They learn to read precision instruments and

tools,” he says.

On the electrical side, students learn to install instruments, calculate voltage and loads, and troubleshoot air conditioning, pressurization and instrument systems using technical and engineering manuals.

“They actually weigh an aircraft and come up with the data that the pilot will have to use when they go flying – when they load the aircraft with passengers and a car on board, they have to calculate the center of gravity of the aircraft to make sure it falls within limits,” Samms says.

One thing students learn is the importance of personally signing off on every step in the maintenance process.

When he speaks to students, he instills the idea that “you should be able to put your mom and your child and whoever on there and be comfortable doing it.”

The program is thorough because “everything is critical,” he says. “Anything that is on the aircraft other than the cockpit instrumentation, they are required to learn how to fix.”

The state’s Aviation College program has an articulation agreement with

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida to train students beyond the two-year level. Athens State University offers a transfer opportunity for a major in management of technology with a minor in aviation management.

Southern Union State Community College has partnered with Auburn University to build a new hangar at Auburn University Regional Airport to expand its maintenance program and support the Auburn School of Aviation.

High school students around the state are taking advantage of training opportunities through dual enrollment.

Samms likes to introduce high school students to aviation careers because “one of the biggest things I find is it’s the best-kept secret,” he says. “Nobody knows about aviation, unless mom or dad work in the field. I’m really working on pushing it in all the high schools regionally across the state.”

Students who complete the program are almost certain to find work, he says.

“There’s a job out there for those who graduate out of the aviation mainte-

nance program,” he says. “They may have to go out of state and several of them do.”

He likes to make potential students aware that “we’ve got this out here. You can live good. The earning potential is great. It’s on par with people leaving colleges with a four-year degree.”

Some of his former students say they’re making as much as \$80,000 a year. “And this was years ago,” he says.

On a side note, Samms says that many people inside the state don’t realize that Alabama’s job training program is nationally respected.

The state is “the tip of the spear when it comes to skills, trade training and innovative programs in workforce training,” he says.

College presidents often ask him how to start aviation programs on their own campuses.

“I say, ‘Listen. Have you got about \$5 million to \$6 million to start with?’,” Samms says with a laugh.

This story originally appeared in the October 2025 issue of Business Alabama.



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THE COOLEST THING

BY JIM HANNAFORD — PHOTOS BY CARY NORTON

A Honda Odyssey minivan may not attract much notice in traffic, but it certainly turns a lot of heads at racetracks. That's something that the racing team at Honda Motor Company's plant in Lincoln has known for years, and more people are finding out about it thanks to a playful statewide competition.

Yes, it's true. The Honda Manufacturing of Alabama facility has a cross-section of employees who spend some of their off-the-clock time tinkering with vehicles to make them more competitive than their street versions. Their undisputed star began its life as a 2017 Odyssey Elite, silver with a black interior — one of more than 3 million vans that the Alabama plant has rolled out since 2001.

"It makes a huge splash when we take

it to events," says Karl Hertel, the leader of the racing team and its principal driver. "Imagine being a spectator and you watch a Corvette go by, and then a BMW and a Mustang and all of a sudden you see an Odyssey go by. It draws a lot of attention, and the thing about it is, it's shockingly capable at racing."

The surprisingly speedy Odyssey was first across the finish line in the annual "Coolest Thing Made in Alabama" contest sponsored by the Manufacture Alabama trade association.

Though its winner is decided by popular vote, the bracket-style competition loosely follows a formula patterned after the March Madness college basketball tournament. It calls attention to the depth and range of the many remarkable products made by companies in Alabama,

Karl Hertel drives the Honda Odyssey that frequently performs in National Auto Sports Association driving events.

from everyday goods and merchandise to high-tech innovations that reach into space exploration and give strength to the nation's military.

"It's a fun way to tell the story of all the amazing things going on in our industry across the state," says Jon Barganier, president and CEO of Manufacture Alabama. "What's interesting is that we see such a wide variety of products and a wide variety of industry sectors represented, whether it's automotive or aerospace or whether it's the chemical industry, the iron and steel products, pulp and paper products, consumer goods... I mean, the list goes on."

The others making it to the Final Four



The same V-6 engine that powers every other Honda Odyssey powers the racing version.

help to bear out that diversity. While Honda earned the checkered flag this time around, the other top vote-getters were a shallow-draft aluminum catamaran that Mobile's Austal builds as a U.S. Navy transport vessel; Blue Origin's powerful thrust BE-4 rocket engine made in Huntsville; and the ductile iron pipe used in water and wastewater systems that's produced by American Cast Iron Pipe Company in Birmingham.

As cool as the others were, they were edged out by a passenger van that took on an unexpected second life as the result of a promotional opportunity that happened in 2017 at the famed Road Atlanta racetrack. Other Honda vehicles were part of the event, and the Honda team decided to also show off an example of its recently unveiled fifth-generation model.

They took a lap to enthusiastic cheers and then quickly started modifying it to make it even more impressive to the racing fans.

In the years since, the Odyssey has performed frequently in National Auto Sports Association driving events as well as the series known as the Gridlife Touring Cup. In 2024, their first professional win came at Barber Motorsports, just

over 30 miles from the Honda plant.

Hertel says the No. 1 question he's asked about the Odyssey racer is how fast it will go, but he says that's not really the point. Instead, the vehicle's handling and agility are what strengthen its overall performance on the track.

"We don't build the car with top speed specifically in mind," he says. "It has to stop and turn just as well as it accelerates. The class that we race in is power-to-weight, so I'm not going to blow you away with the top speed it can reach, but Road Atlanta has a pretty long back straightaway and I think we've seen like 127 miles an hour before braking into the next turn. We've never taken it to Talladega Superspeedway to find out how fast it could really go."

Another question he gets a lot is how heavily the vehicle has been reconfigured, but he says that underneath its colorful wrap much of the vehicle is in stock condition.

"The van itself has a factory V-6 engine and a factory transmission. Really, the biggest changes to it are that it has a more track-focused suspension," Hertel says. "It has bigger brakes and bigger wheels and it's about 1,600 pounds light-

er than a factory Odyssey. It's a vehicle designed to take eight people around in comfort on the highway, so once you take the people out and take all the stuff out (including seats and carpet) all of a sudden it really wakes up and becomes something much more sporty than you might think it would be."

Hertel says his team is happy to receive recognition from Manufacture Alabama, in part because it calls attention to his company, which employs 4,500 people and also produces Honda's Passport, Pilot and Ridgeline models. The racing team he leads has about 15 active members from various departments who work according to their different schedules.

"Probably 95% of what they do is working on the cars — modifying them, fixing them — and 5% is actually driving them," he says. "All of this is done after hours. They finish their shift and come to our shop that's across the street. If we have a race or another event that week, it's not uncommon for us to be there until 10 or 10:30 or 11 o'clock at night getting stuff ready. At the same time, because it's all volunteer, you're welcome to come and go as you can. We understand that some people can give more time than others."

From Barganier's perspective, shedding light on what Honda's racing team does is just another way of illustrating the complex makeup of Alabama's business and industry landscape. He is already looking toward next year's competition, which will be the third one in which the public casts votes to crown a single product as the state's champion. More than 50,000 votes were cast, he says, and some nominees waged active social media campaigns.

"We do like running it concurrently with the March Madness basketball tournament because there's a lot of energy and excitement around that," Barganier says. "It brings out a little bit of competition and gets the general public and the companies engaged, so we will continue to do this to highlight the industry — among many other things we do throughout the year."

This story originally appeared in the June 2026 issue of Business Alabama.

As the United States recognizes its 250th anniversary, there is an Alabama company that has been around for exactly half of the country's official existence. The Birmingham-based Buffalo Rock Company was founded in 1901, making 2026 the beverage manufacturer's 125th anniversary.

And after a century-plus, the company has not lost any of its fizz. In fact, Buffalo Rock is wrapping up a nearly decade-long, \$300 million investment into its facilities and overall operations, including a new 127,000-square-foot corporate headquarters on the site of the old Bruno's Supermarkets headquarters.

"It has been an unbelievable time of change for this company," Buffalo Rock President and CEO Matthew Dent says. "We have poured a ton of capital into fueling that, and have essentially rewired the entire business. We're almost unrecognizable from where we were when this campaign started."

Things certainly have changed tremendously for Buffalo Rock since the company was founded shortly after the turn of the previous century. That was when Sidney Lee merged his wholesale grocery firm with a competitor to form the Alabama Grocery Company and simultaneously began working on the creation of a ginger-based beverage.

At a recent event celebrating Buffalo Rock's 125th anniversary, James "Jimmy" Lee III — Sidney Lee's great-grandson and the current company chairman — explained how both the Buffalo Rock drink and name originated.

"My great-grandfather married a woman whose dad was a chemist in Selma, and he was messing around with a ginger ale product to help with nausea," Jimmy Lee said. "They had used ginger for that during the Civil War, so he had the basic structure of the product. Then my great-grandfather put a little carbonation in it, and they had a drink that they started bottling in the basement (of the grocery in downtown Birmingham)."

As for the intriguing name, which officially became the company name in 1927, Lee says there apparently is no great mystery behind it.

"The Lees are pretty simple people," he said with a smile. "The story I always heard was that my great-grandfather was



FULL FIZZ AHEAD

BY CARY ESTES

taking a train out West and saw a buffalo standing on a rock, and thought it would be a good name. That's how Buffalo Rock came about."

While the beverage was a local success, the company grew slowly for several decades and entered the years leading up to World War II with fewer than 50 total employees. But then after the war, 31-year-old James Lee Jr. took over from

his father as company president and began a series of deals that significantly changed Buffalo Rock's future.

First, in 1951, he purchased the Birmingham-area franchise for Pepsi-Cola.

The Buffalo Rock leadership team, from left, Emily Brown Cotney, Matthew Dent and Wayne Wisdom. Photo by Cary Norton.

That was followed in the 1960s by similar franchise deals for Dr Pepper, Mountain Dew and 7 Up. “My dad had the vision of realizing how big those brands could be one day,” Jimmy Lee III says. “That was the beginning of what we have now.”

What Buffalo Rock currently has are 75 different beverage brands. In addition to two dozen soft drink offerings, the company has expanded over the decades into water (including Aquafina and Evian), coffee and tea (Lipton, Red Diamond), sports and energy drinks (Gatorade, Amp), juices (Ocean Spray, Snapple) and even a recent foray into alcohol (Bubly sparkling wine, Lipton Hard Iced Tea).

Add it all together, and the Buffalo Rock Company currently manufactures nearly a billion units annually, selling to more than 7 million consumers and 15,000 retail customers through 14 franchises located in Alabama, western Georgia and the Florida Panhandle. The company has eight production lines that produce an average of 1,100 12-ounce cans and 750 20-ounce bottles per minute.

“It is a fully integrated supply chain that’s running at a high efficiency,” Dent says. “That’s what this investment has allowed us to do. We’re moving at a rapid speed.”

These changes were necessary, Buffalo Rock officials say, for the company to remain relevant moving forward. It is an attitude that the Lee family repeatedly emphasized, including through a quote that once adorned the wall of the previous headquarters that stated, in essence, “If you’re doing the same thing today that you did yesterday, you’re already out of business and don’t even know it yet.”

“Our organization now more than ever before is embracing rapid change, because the world is going that way,” Buffalo Rock Senior Vice President Emily Brown Cotney says. “So, we’re adapting more quickly than we ever have.”

Chief Business Operations Officer Wayne Wisdom agrees. He has worked at Buffalo Rock for more than 30 years and says the increase in the business tempo is one of the biggest differences he has seen since his arrival.

“It was a much slower pace when I started,” Wisdom says. “Today everything is very fast, with customer orders coming



through the (computer) system. But what it takes to stay in business for 125 years is innovation year after year after year. And thank goodness we changed, because a snail’s pace doesn’t get you very far these days.”

The one thing Buffalo Rock officials say hasn’t changed is the company’s commitment to its employees, which now number more than 2,000. Cotney says one of the primary challenges is for the company to maintain a smaller family-type atmosphere even as it continues to grow into an expansive billion-dollar business.

“We call ourselves a family company, and that’s what we always want to be,” Cotney says. “We travel to each of our locations every year so we can see people eye-to-eye. Just knowing people’s names can go a long way.

“We’re very intentional in trying to have personal interactions with everyone in the business. We obviously can’t do that every day. But we do have ways that we try to get out in front of people where they can see and hear us and hopefully make them feel like they belong here.”

James “Jimmy” Lee III, chairman, and Matthew Dent, president and CEO, in Buffalo Rock’s lobby. Photo courtesy of Buffalo Rock.

Of course, there is one person whose opinion still matters a little more than the rest. It is the man whose family founded Buffalo Rock, and who continues showing up at the office nearly every workday.

“Jimmy was the person who began using the term ‘employee-partner’ to describe the people who work here,” Dent says. “He wanted to create that sense of belonging that they are all part of the Buffalo Rock family. That brings a different responsibility for the rest of us.”

The longevity of the company “is a testament to the Lee family and their perseverance through good and bad. Their stated purpose for the company is building brands through legendary service and remarkable people. That’s what got us this far, and it’s what is going to carry us for another 125 years.”

This story originally appeared in the July 2026 issue of Business Alabama.



NOAH AND THE ARC

BY CARY ESTES
PHOTOS BY DAVID HIGGINBOTHAM

John Carter began perfecting his Noah Basketball System more than 20 years ago.

Longtime UAB Blazers head basketball coach Gene Bartow had a simple – though somewhat grammatically incorrect – way of summing up the thin line between success and failure in his chosen sport.

“Well, there’s no doubt, if you don’t shoot good, you don’t look good,” Bartow often said in his folksy manner.

Indeed, while rebounding, passing and defense are all important components of the game, the bottom-line goal of basketball is to put the basketball in the goal. And for more than 20 years, Alabama native John Carter has been utilizing technology to help players become better shooters through the Noah Basketball system.

The original concept of Noah Basketball was to employ computer sensors and data to analyze and adjust the arc that players put on their shots in an effort to improve their shooting percentage. The company name is a play on words in reference to the biblical Noah, who Carter said had “the perfect arc.”

The idea began in the early 2000s with a California physicist and venture capitalist named Alan Marty, who simply wanted to help his high school-aged daughter with her shooting. But Carter

took Marty’s design and set out on a fastbreak with it. Two decades later, the Noah Basketball system is now used by 28 of the 30 teams in the NBA and several in the WNBA, along with more than 200 college programs and more than 1,000 high school teams.

“I pinch myself occasionally, because I’m just a guy from Elkmont, Alabama, who loves basketball and engineering, and now I have NBA coaches who want to talk with me,” Carter says with a chuckle.

That certainly was not the case initially, as the company scuffled along for several years while trying to gain widespread acceptance. In fact, Carter says some of the coaches he talked to in those early days were downright “rude” in their rejections.

“The resistance we received was strong,” Carter says. “The most common quote I got was, ‘You can’t use a computer to teach a player to shoot a basketball.’ And I’d say about 80% of the players didn’t like it either.”

But Carter gradually gained converts as the system proved to be successful in improving a team’s shooting percentage. One of the earliest was current Samford head coach Lennie Acuff, who was head coach at the University of Alabama in Huntsville from 1997 to 2019.

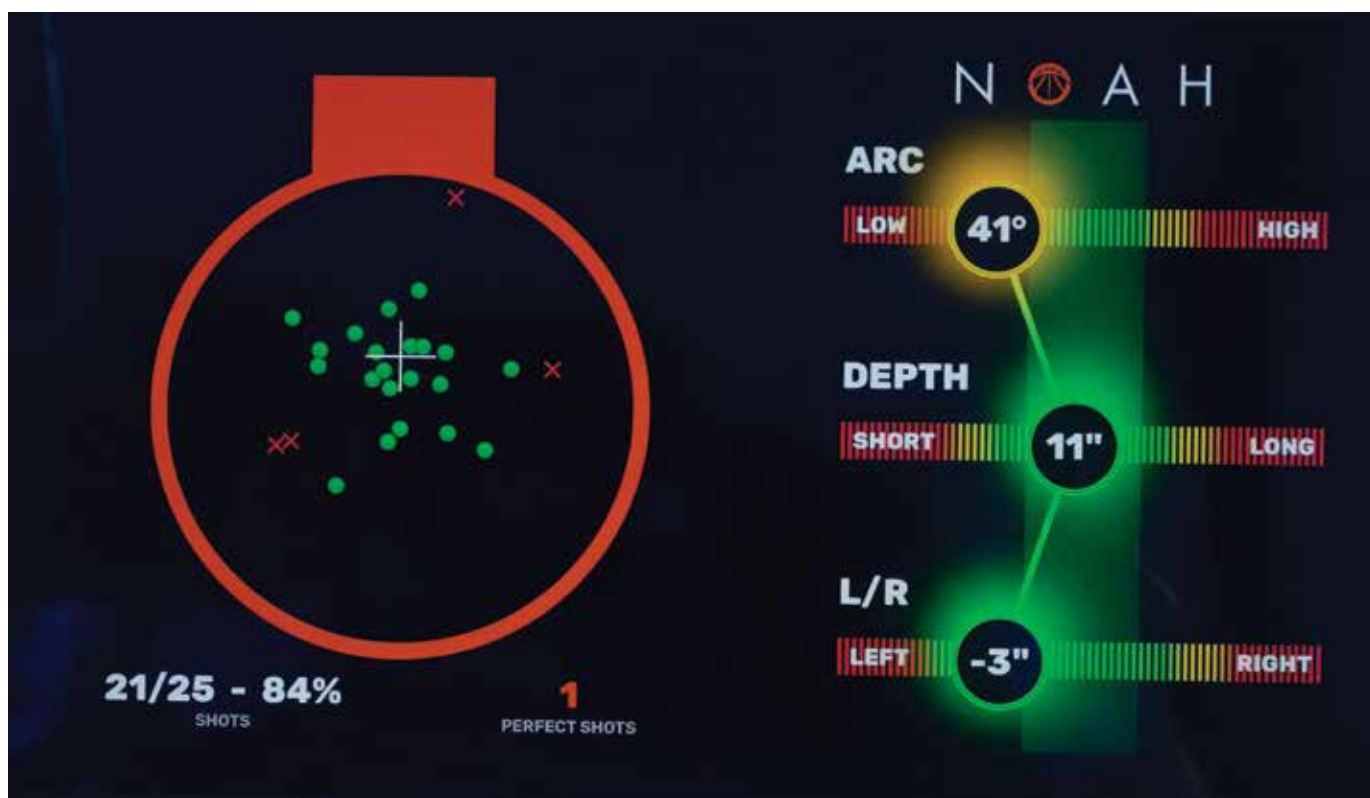
“John showed up and said he had this machine that can tell you the perfect arc for a basketball shot,” Acuff recalls. “He seemed like a really nice guy, so I said we’d try it. Then he wheels in this big machine that looked like an old jukebox.

“I felt like we were kind of his guinea pigs for what he was trying to do. Then the next thing I know, everything he was saying was working. It was giving kids immediate data-driven feedback, and they became better shooters.”

Still, the system had limitations, and success was hardly a slam dunk. But things changed dramatically in 2017 when Noah Basketball began analyzing shots with depth sensors, the types that are used in driverless cars and other robotic devices.

“That was huge, because instead of only being able to track a free throw or a straight-ahead shot, now we were able to track every shot on the floor,” Carter says. “And not only could we track the trajectory (arc), but we are able to track the position within the rim (depth) as well as how far the shots went to the left or right.”

The Noah Basketball System is used by 28 NBA teams.





Carter and his small team took this new product to the annual MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference in Boston. Officials there were so impressed that Noah Basketball won first place in both the research category and the startup company competition.

“We went from having a couple of NBA teams interested in us to suddenly having NBA teams all over us,” Carter says. “That really was almost a relaunch for the company.”

Since then, Noah Basketball has expanded its ability to monitor shots, as well as the type of data it produces. The company now uses facial recognition technology, eliminating the need for players to wear sensors or outside parties to enter data. In addition, the former “jukebox” machine has been reduced to a single sensor that easily can be attached to a backboard.

The system has become so advanced that a coach can use an app to access video of every shot a player has taken, then filter it to show only shots that were missed in a certain way (i.e., to the left, off the back rim, etc.). “So, the coach can get with a player and have all that data

and those videos filtered immediately, and they can go over it together,” Carter says.

Of course, there are still plenty of old-school coaches who might resist the thought of putting so much computerized data into a sport that often relies on instincts and split-second decision making. Acuff, who is 60, says he doesn’t want players “to have paralysis by analysis.”

“I don’t want our guys to be so analytical they become robots,” Acuff says. “But this is really something you use more in workouts. What you’re trying to create is muscle memory. If you do it often enough, you automatically know it. So, it becomes more of a teaching mechanism. If you really buy into the numbers and figure out consistency of arc, consistency of depth, it works.”

Plus, as Carter points out, “We now have a whole generation of players who grew up with technology in their pockets. So, they expect data and apps and computers in almost everything they do.”

The growth of Noah Basketball has enabled the company to move into a 12,000-square-foot facility in Madison that includes an indoor basketball court

TOP LEFT: The Noah system uses cameras and sensors to track basketball shots and who is shooting them. TOP RIGHT: Noah Basketball’s Madison facility includes an indoor basketball court.

(previously, the company had to reserve space at local gyms to test its products). Carter says Noah now has more than 20 full-time employees, most of whom have some sort of basketball-playing experience in their background.

And perhaps most importantly, Noah Basketball has collected data from more than 600 million basketball shots over the years.

“After all that, we know the answers of what leads to good shooting and what leads to poor shooting,” Carter says. “So, we can quickly diagnose what the problem is, and then they can go back and work on those. If you have the answers to the test, you’re a pretty smart person.”

And in turn, you’ll look pretty good on the basketball court.

This article originally appeared in the November 2025 issue of Business Alabama.

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Exports in 2025 were worth more than \$23.7 billion

HERE ARE THE NUMBERS

Alabama companies exported goods and services worth more than \$23.7 billion in 2025. It's a step down from the previous year, but still 14% higher than in 2019. The Department of Commerce called the five-year increase "a signal that the state's recovery continues in the post-pandemic global economy."

Goods were exported to 190 countries — the vast majority of the countries on Earth. Trading partners included powerhouse economies like Canada and Germany, but also tiny island nations including Western Samoa, Tonga and the Solomon Islands.

"Exports are a vital driver of Alabama's economy," the

department reports, "supporting thousands of jobs and strengthening industries across the state. From automobiles and aerospace components to chemicals and industrial machinery, Alabama-made goods are reaching markets around the world, fueling economic growth at home."

Transportation equipment — everything from the family car to ships and rockets — is Alabama's top export, valued at more than \$11 billion. Motors vehicles are the largest part of that category, totaling more than \$8 billion. And aerospace equipment accounted for \$1.7 billion, up 12% from the previous year.

Next came chemicals at \$1.9 billion; primary metals at \$1.9 billion; and minerals and ores at \$1.6 billion.

Where in the World?

Alabama goods shipped abroad

► \$23.7 billion

Top destination

► Canada — \$4.3 billion

3 More Billion-Dollar Partners

- Mexico
- Germany
- China

Top Exports

- Motor vehicles and parts — \$9.5 billion
- Mineral fuels — \$2.3 billion
- Aircraft and parts — \$1.6 billion
- Industrial machinery — \$1.5 billion
- Iron and steel — \$1.4 billion



TOP: Twilight over the Port of Mobile.

MIDDLE: The Airbus ship docks with parts for a new jet.

BOTTOM: Pinto Island Steel Terminal, which uses magnets to move massive steel slabs.

All photos courtesy of Alabama Port Authority.

PORT OF HUNTSVILLE



The Port of Huntsville is Alabama's inland gateway for international commerce as the busiest air cargo and intermodal terminal in the state. Strategically located adjacent to Interstate Highway 565, the Port encompasses 7,800 acres and is home to Huntsville International Airport (HSV), the International Intermodal Center, Jetplex Industrial Park and Spaceport. The convergence of commercial passenger service, rail and air cargo operations, and business enterprises sets the Port of Huntsville apart as unique among airports and cargo ports in the U.S.

The Port of Huntsville generates more than \$1.8 billion in total regional economic impact and accounts for 38% of Alabama's aviation jobs and 38.5% of the state's aviation payroll, according to a study commissioned by the Aviation Council of Alabama. Its revenue comes from a diverse range of sources, including commercial passenger air service, rail and air cargo, land sales and leases, and

airport-owned and leased facilities.

Huntsville is ranked among the top 25 airports in the continental United States for international air cargo volume and is the North American hub for global freight forwarder DSV. HSV is served by domestic and international cargo carriers DSV, Federal Express and UPS. Weekly international cargo service links Huntsville to Luxembourg; Hong Kong; Seoul, South Korea; Mexico City, Mexico; Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Freight forwarder DSV operates nonstop 747 freighter international air cargo service to Europe, Asia and South America and offers fully integrated and customizable supply chain solutions at Huntsville International. DSV serves high-tech customers in health care and chemical industries with temperature-controlled storage and transport capabilities. Advanced warehouse services, customizable IT enhancements and direct access to its road feeder service in Huntsville allow DSV to also provide

The Port of Huntsville combines passenger, air cargo, rail and interstate access into a major intermodal hub for the Southeast. *Photo courtesy of Huntsville International Airport.*

last-minute solutions for needs of all customers.

Handling diverse cargo including everything from automotive parts to beverage exports, the International Intermodal Center (IIC) provides a single-hub location that delivers world-class, multimodal services and facilities. The IIC specializes in receiving, transferring, storing and distributing international and domestic cargo via rail and highway. U.S. Customs and Border Protection port inspectors, USDA inspectors, freight forwarders and customs brokers are located onsite. Intermodal rail service is provided by Norfolk Southern connecting Huntsville to seaports at the Port of Savannah and Port of Charleston on the East coast and the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles on the West coast.

The Port of Huntsville owns four air

cargo buildings with 10 bays totaling more than 435,000 square feet of warehouse and office space that is adjacent to 2.1 million square feet of paved ramp. Within those facilities are 35,000 square feet of dedicated cold storage space enhancing its supply chain logistics solutions facilities. Capital investment in infrastructure to support airport, intermodal cargo transportation and tenant operations at The Port of Huntsville totals \$2.1 billion.

The Jetplex Industrial Park is a premier, 4,000-acre master-planned industrial and commercial park and one of the region's largest economic engines, operating as part of the multi-modal Port of Huntsville network alongside the Huntsville International Airport and the International Intermodal Center. The park is highly sought after because it combines air, rail and highway transportation in one footprint.

Huntsville International Airport (HSV) is keeping pace with the rapid growth of Alabama's largest city and is fueled by a record year for passenger traffic, cargo and multi-million-dollar invest-

ments in infrastructure and amenities.

HSV celebrated 59 years of operation in 2026 and has been voted Best Small Airport in the U.S. by Newsweek in an online reader poll for two consecutive years in 2024 and 2025. Since its inception in 1967, HSV has grown its footprint to 7,800 acres, making it among the largest commercial airports by total acreage in the southeastern U.S. The HSV Airport Master Plan shows a desired ultimate development that includes five parallel runways flanked by additional cargo bays, warehousing and distribution facilities.

Nonstop passenger service to 18 destinations is provided by five commercial airlines: Allegiant Air, American Airlines, Breeze Airways, Delta Air Lines and United Airlines. HSV served more than 1.7 million customers in 2025 with more than 70 commercial passenger flights on peak days. The airport features two parallel runways with lengths of 10,000 feet and 12,600 feet (second-longest runway in the southeastern U.S.) The runways are separated by 5,000 feet, allowing for simultaneous operation in instrument

conditions.

Huntsville is the hub of Alabama aerospace enterprise, and its airport is the first in the U.S. to receive an FAA re-entry license to land a commercial space vehicle. Working with Sierra Space, HSV anticipates that the company's Dream Chaser spacecraft could be the first space vehicle to land at a commercial airport.

The Huntsville UAS Vertical Research Center (HUVRC) is the newest addition to Port of Huntsville's high-tech portfolio. The HUVRC campus includes an office building housing UAS companies for drone first responder training, as well as launch facilities for UAS and CUAS research, training and development.

Besides the four main operating entities, Port of Huntsville amenities include fixed-base operator Signature Aviation, recently completing a \$12 million terminal, Foreign Trade Zone No. 83, Sunset Landing Golf Course and the Four Points by Sheraton hotel.

For more information, visit the Port of Huntsville website at portofhuntsville.com and the Huntsville International Airport website at flyhuntsville.com.



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ALABAMA PORT AUTHORITY

The Port of Mobile plays a major role in economic development across the state, providing the connectivity and access to global markets that attract new investment and help Alabama businesses thrive.

Strategically located on the central Gulf Coast, the Port of Mobile has deep-water access and efficient harbor operations that allow vessels to move from anchorage to berth in just three hours. From there, inbound cargo can move efficiently across the state and the nation by rail, river, road or air via Mobile America Express (MAX). This extensive multimodal network includes five Class I railroads, nearly 15,000 miles of inland waterways, an international airport, inland port facilities and two major interstate corridors — I-10 and I-65. Through MAX, more than half of the U.S. population is within a 72-hour reach of the Port of Mobile.

The Alabama Port Authority (APA) serves all 67 counties in Alabama and oversees the public berths and terminals at the Port of Mobile as well as other facilities across the state. With strong state

and federal support, APA is making historic investments in its critical infrastructure. More than \$375 million in capital projects are currently underway across APA's statewide network, with more than \$2 billion in additional investment planned over the next 10 to 15 years.

Some of APA's ongoing capital projects include a multiphase expansion of the container terminal operated by APM Terminals Mobile, the development of the Montgomery Inland Rail Port and extensive modernization efforts at Mobile's general cargo and coal export terminals. These improvements will build on the recently completed Mobile Harbor Modernization Project — a multi-year effort that expanded Mobile's federal shipping channel to a depth of 50 feet and made the Port of Mobile the deepest container port on the Gulf of America.

Maritime commerce at the Port of Mobile has impacts in communities throughout the state of Alabama. From 2019 through 2024, marine cargo activity at the Port of Mobile generated more than \$415.8 billion in economic value for Alabama and more than \$10 billion in state and local tax revenues. Port-related activity

Alabama Port Authority facilities line the banks of the Mobile River. *Photos courtesy of Alabama Port Authority.*

supports one in seven jobs across the state.

The General Cargo facilities at the Port of Mobile offer access to more than 30 berths, 2.4 million square feet of warehousing and over 55 acres of laydown space. With on-dock rail and easy access for trucks and barges, the facilities are built to handle imports and exports of steel, forest products, heavy machinery, project components and other breakbulk cargo. With Gottwald cranes, heavy-lift equipment, roll-on/roll-off ramps and a 40-foot draft to serve large vessels, the general cargo docks have the flexibility to serve a variety of customers.

In addition to its five Class I connections, the Port of Mobile is also connected to four short-line railroads, including its own Terminal Railway Alabama State Docks (TASD). TASD is one of the nation's largest port authority-owned railroads, handling more than 176,000 revenue-producing rail cars in 2025 and maintaining over 75 miles of track and nine locomotives.

PORT FACTS (APA TERMINALS ONLY)

As of October 1, 2026

- ▶ **Acreage:** 4,000
- ▶ **Number of Berths:** 41
- ▶ **Channel Depth**
Lower Harbor: 50 feet
Upper Harbor: 40 feet
- ▶ **Warehousing and Open Yards:**
4.8 million square feet

APA STATS FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2025

- ▶ **Number of Vessel Calls**
Port-Wide: 1,674
- ▶ **Vessel Calls at APA Berths:** 912
- ▶ **Overall Tonnage**
(FY 2025): 53.8 million
- ▶ **Imports:** heavy lift and oversized cargo, containerized cargoes, thermal coal, aluminum, iron, steel, copper, pig iron, wood pulp, plywood, fence posts, veneers, automotive components, frozen fish, furniture components, wind energy components, aviation components, retail goods, cement, aggregates and chemicals.
- ▶ **Exports:** metallurgical coal, heavy lift and oversized cargo, containerized cargoes, iron, carbon and stainless steel, automotive components, lumber, plywood, wood pulp, OSB, laminate, flooring, roll and cut paper, frozen poultry, grain and chemicals.

Strategically located on the central Gulf Coast, the Port of Mobile has deep-water access and efficient harbor operations that allow vessels to move from anchorage to berth in just three hours.

Container Terminal

The Alabama Port Authority's container terminal, operated by APM Terminals, an independent division in A.P. Moller – Maersk, is undergoing a multiphase expansion designed to accommodate future growth and strengthen Mobile's position as America's Gulf Gateway. More than \$1 billion in public and private investment is driving the expansion of containerized trade through Mobile, including the recent shipping channel expansion and projects at the terminal that will add a third berth, additional operational space and enhanced rail infrastructure. Once complete, these projects will effectively double the terminal's throughput capacity to nearly 1.4 million TEUs annually.

Beginning in 2027, a new inter-terminal connection to APM's adjacent Intermodal Container Transfer Facility (ICTF) will provide direct, on-dock access to the five Class I railroads serving the Port of Mobile. Two additional rail-mounted gantry cranes will allow the ICTF to handle up to 175,000 lifts annually and enable containers to move more efficiently from Mobile — reach-

ing major inland destinations like Chicago in just two days.

Montgomery Inland Rail Port

In February 2025, the Alabama Port Authority broke ground on its first inland rail facility for containers. A \$100 million investment, the Montgomery Inland Rail Port is a 272-acre facility that will connect central Alabama businesses to the Port by CSX rail, with truck access for regional distribution and capacity to handle up to 60,000 TEUs annually. Scheduled to open in spring 2027, the Montgomery Inland Rail Port will give central Alabama's largest manufacturers, distributors and exporters flexible options to move and store containerized cargo.

Inland Waterways

Along Alabama's inland waterways, the Alabama Port Authority owns eight river port facilities: in Bridgeport on the Tennessee River; in Cordova on the Black Warrior River; in Demopolis on the Tombigbee River; in Selma and

Montgomery on the Alabama River; in Columbia and Eufaula on the Chattahoochee River; and in Axis on the Mobile River.

These facilities connect communities and industries across the state to a waterway network reaching the Tennessee and Ohio valleys, the Great Lakes and the Gulf Coast. The Port of Mobile also connects to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, providing coastal access from Texas to Florida. Together, these waterways support the movement of bulk commodities such as coal, steel, liquid products and aggregates to and from the Port of Mobile.

Coal and Steel

The Alabama Port Authority's McDuffie Coal Terminal is one of the largest coal-

handling facilities in the nation and a critical piece of the supply chain for steel production worldwide. McDuffie provides diverse handling capabilities, with direct ship, barge and rail access. With Alabama's metallurgical coal exports surging to support global steel production, McDuffie and the Port are meeting the demand with more than \$230 million in investments currently underway to improve terminal operations and export capabilities.

After being exported from the Port as a bulk commodity, metallurgical coal can return to Mobile in the form of slab steel, often at Pinto Steel Terminal. Purpose-built to support Alabama steel mills, the terminal offers a 50-foot draft, a 1,050-foot-long ship berth, an automated barge-handling system and a slab storage yard. This terminal is equipped with three post-Panamax gantry cranes, and it was the first terminal in North America to use magnet technology in a ship-to-shore

cargo handling operation. With three rotating teams, the Pinto Steel Terminal moved more than 2 million tons of steel slabs in 2025 — breaking multiple single-day import records.

The Port also moves stainless and carbon steel coils at Alabama Steel Terminals. This is a multimodal steel coil handling facility with four 50-ton bridge cranes, a 173,280-square-foot warehouse and an adjacent 168,000-square-foot open yard, all supported by integrated technology that provides shippers with real-time cargo data and tracking. Like the operations on Pinto Island, the work at AST's facility on the main docks is critical to Alabama's steel industry.

Roll-on Roll-off Capabilities

The Port of Mobile offers flexible roll-on/roll-off capabilities for wheeled, oversized and project cargo, supported by RO/RO ramps, heavy-lift equipment, on-dock rail and direct highway access. These capabilities support Airbus' Mobile manufacturing operations through a dedicated RO/RO terminal that delivers critical aircraft components by barge to the Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley, home to three final assembly lines for A220 and A320-family aircraft.

Mobile is also home to CG Railway's U.S.-Mexico rail-ferry service, which is supported by TASD at a dedicated terminal. CG Railway operates the Cherokee and Mayan, two 590-foot, double-deck rail ferries connecting Mobile with Coatzacoalcas, Veracruz. Each vessel can carry up to 135 railcars, allowing cargo to remain in the railcars during the Gulf crossing and providing an efficient alternative to overland routes between U.S. and Mexican markets.

APA Leadership

The Alabama Port Authority is governed by a nine-member board of directors, including eight members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Alabama Senate, with the mayor of Mobile and the president of the Mobile County Commission serving as an ex officio member in alternating years. In November 2025, the board appointed Doug Otto as director and chief executive officer.



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TRAVELING ALABAMA'S MARINE HIGHWAY

BY NANCY RANDALL

When a semi driver encounters a delay on I-65 in Alabama, he can take a different route to ensure his load is delivered on time. But with river shipping, there are no barge exit ramps when a lock and dam fail.

Those depending on Alabama's M-65 Marine Highway System experienced this type of failure first-hand in 2024, when three locks failed, including Demopolis, Holt and Wilson. The failures resulted in significant delays for shippers and carriers who rely on the rivers that make up the M-65.

The economic impact of the three lock failures is estimated to be in the millions of dollars, say industry experts.

The three locks are far beyond their teenage years. All are nearing the 75-year mark but were designed for 50-year lifespans, says Mitch Mays, administrator, Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Development Authority, TTWDA for short. "It is our contention that it is now

time for the U.S. Congress and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to consider constructing new locks at these locations to prevent disruptions in the future," he says.

As announced in March, the TTWDA formally requested the U.S. Congress to authorize a Marine Highway 65 reliability report in the Water Resources Development Act of 2026. "Ultimately, we view this as an economic development issue. If the system isn't reliable, then business and industry are less likely to use or locate on waterway-served sites," Mays explains.

When The Locks Failed

When the 2024 lock failures happened, the Corps of Engineers — COE — had to quickly determine their level of severity, explains Tim Parker III, president of Parker Towing, a barge operator based in Tuscaloosa. "The first thing the COE does is assess and evaluate what the issue is. Ultimately, the structural integrity of

ABOVE: Marine Highway 65 is the preferred route for thousands of tons of goods ranging from grains to steel to rockets. Photo courtesy of Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Development Authority.

the chamber is most important."

In a lock-and-dam system, vessels are moved between different water levels by raising or lowering them in a controlled chamber, similar to a water elevator.

In addition to the COE's evaluation, barge lines, shipping companies, steel mills, coal companies, power plants and other industry players had to figure out how they were going to get goods to their final destinations with the lock outages, Parker notes.

For example, when the Demopolis Lock failed, industry could use the Tenn-Tom as an alternate route, he explains. "Depending on where cargo was going, sometimes that was an economically justifiable option. [But] for other customers and cargoes, it was not some-

thing that they could stomach [with] the excess costs and excess transit time.”

Other options included using truck or rail to the end destination or to a location below the lock where cargo could be loaded onto a barge, Parker explains.

The Demopolis failure was felt across the Southeast as ports north of Demopolis could not ship to Mobile, Mays says. The alternative: ship north on the Tenn-Tom, then the Ohio River and finally down the Mississippi River. “What would normally be a three-day tow was now a 30-day tow, dramatically increasing the costs to move cargo,” he says.

The Demopolis and Holt locks have no auxiliary chambers, so when they fail, barge traffic stops. Wilson Lock does have an auxiliary chamber, “So you could still transit Wilson Lock, but because it was so much smaller, it created long wait periods,” says Parker — sometimes up to three weeks.

“[The Wilson Lock repairs] really caused a bottleneck on the waterways because anything that we had moving north on the Tenn-Tom or the Warrior-Tombigbee was likely to pass through Wilson,” explains Wynne Fuller, president, Warrior-Tombigbee Waterway Association.

Several association members experienced almost total shutdowns at Wilson, with the sand and gravel business especially impacted, Fuller notes. Some of these aggregates are used to build roads,

affecting work on our highway systems, he adds.

Additionally, Mays notes, steel, grains, petro and United Launch Alliance rockets were “severely hampered in cargo movement” due to the Wilson shutdown.

Economic Impact

Together, cargo activity on the Warrior-Tombigbee Waterway, Tennessee River and the Tenn-Tom generated \$17.8 billion in total economic value for Alabama, according to a report that Fuller shared last year with state legislators. This activity contributed to more than 88,000 jobs, the report indicates.

Alabama's inland waterways – a few facts

Here's some data shared by industry experts:

- **Tonnage** — An estimated 50 million tons per year are transported.
- **Navigable waterways on the M-65** — Warrior-Tombigbee, more than 400 miles; Tenn-Tom, 234 miles; Tennessee River, more than 650 miles
- **Main carriers** — Parker Towing, Cooper Marine, Ingram, Marquette, Tennessee Valley Towing, Southern Towing and Kirby
- **Barges** — Least expensive means of moving bulk commodities like sand, gravel, coal and soybeans
- **Cargo capacity** — A single barge,

which can carry 1,500 tons, is 15 times greater than one rail car (100 tons) and 60 times greater than one semi-truck (25 tons).

- **Barge transit vs. trucks** — The volume of cargo transported via barges on the inland waterways reduced the number of trucks on Alabama roads by more than 850,000, assuming 25 tons per truck (based on 2022 tonnage).
- **Environmental impact** — Inland barges produce less CO₂ per ton of cargo moved vs. other transit options (barge, 19.3 tons per million; rail, 26.9 tons; truck, 71.6 tons).

M-65's history

According to TTWDA, the M-65 is a federally designated inland waterway corridor that includes the Tennessee River, the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, and the Tombigbee, Black Warrior and Mobile river systems. The M-65 designation was awarded in 2010, says Mays.

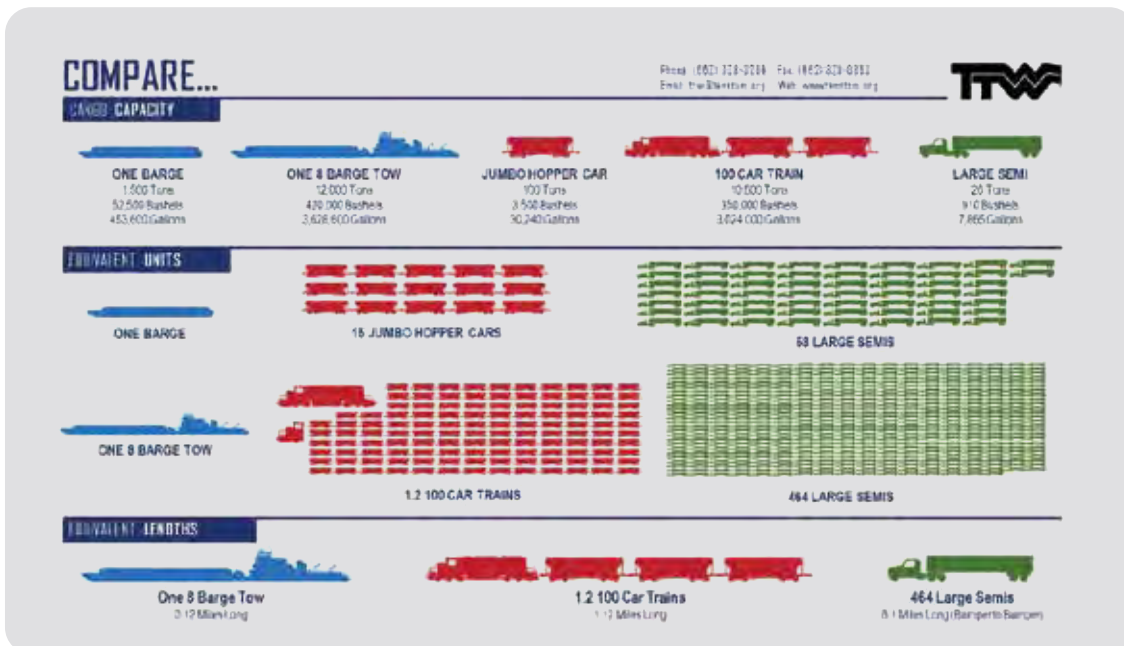
The M-65, which parallels I-65, links mid-America manufacturers, agricultural producers and energy companies to domestic and international markets via environmentally efficient barge transportation.

The M-65 is part of the Marine Highway Program started by the U.S. Maritime Administration in 2007 by an act of Congress, Mays explains. The program sought to identify water routes that could serve as an extension of the surface transportation system.

“In other words,” he says, “treating the inland waterway system as part of a strategic freight network for moving cargo.”

Having a reliable waterway system could mean that that next big company chooses Alabama and doesn't take a detour elsewhere.

This story originally appeared in the June 2026 issue of Business Alabama.



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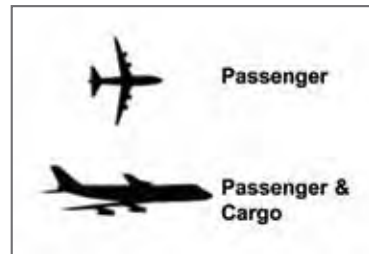
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ALABAMA WATERWAY SYSTEM





ALABAMA COMMERCIAL AIRPORTS



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Alabama Economic Development Incentives

“Alabama has one of the most competitive business climates in the nation,” says the Alabama Department of Commerce. And the fact that tax incentives are statutory — part of the state’s constitution and codes — “gives industry a stable framework for long-term investment.”

Citing Alabama’s tax burden as among the lowest in the nation, the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama says, “Alabama is one of a small number of states that allow a full deduction of federal taxes paid from state income tax liability.”

That provision drops an actual 6.5% corporate tax rate to an effective rate of 4.9%, lower even than any of the state’s Southern neighbors.

Here’s a quick look at major tax incentives and credits:

Jobs Act Incentives

► **Jobs Credit.** Annual cash refund up to 3% of the previous year’s gross payroll for up to 10 years, with enhanced benefits for companies employing veterans, locating in a targeted or jumpstart county, qualifying as a technology company, or engaging in pharmaceutical, biomedical, or medical supplies or R&D activities.

► **Investment Credit.** Credit of up to 1.5% of the qualified capital investment costs for up to 10 years. Credit can be taken against the Alabama income tax, financial institution excise tax, insurance premium tax, utility tax and/or utility license tax liability.

Credit is available for up to 15 years for companies locating in a targeted or jumpstart county.

Alabama Tax Reform Act and Alabama Reinvestment and Abatements Act

► **New Facility and Expansion.**

1. Abatement of eligible non-educational portion of sales and use taxes on construction materials, and
2. Abatement of eligible non-educational portion of property tax for up to 20 years.

► **Existing Facility: Refurbishments, Upgrades or Placed Back in Service.**

1. Abatement of eligible non-educational sales and use taxes on construction materials and equipment
2. Abatement of eligible non-educational property taxes for up to 20 years of the incremental property tax increases
3. Exemption from taxes for increased utility services for up to 10 years

► **Data Processing Centers.** Property tax and sales tax abatement for up to 10 years for projects that invest up to \$200 million; Property tax and sales tax abatement for up to 20 years for projects that invest over \$200 million but less than \$400 million; Property tax and sales tax abatement for up to 30 years for projects that exceed \$400 million investment

► **Full Employment Act Credit.** Employers with fewer than 50 employees are eligible for a \$1,000 nonrefundable income tax or financial institution excise tax credit for each qualifying job created.

► **Heroes for Hire Credit.** Employers may also be eligible for an additional \$1,000 nonrefundable income tax or financial institution excise tax credit if the employee is a qualifying veteran.

► **Net Operating Loss Carryforward.**

Companies may carry forward any operating losses for up to 15 years.

► **Alabama Enterprise Zone Credit.**

Credits and exemptions based on numbers of employees for businesses locating in depressed areas of the state.

► **Income Tax Education Credit.** Allows an employer to take a tax credit for 20% of the cost of an employer-sponsored program to improve basic skills through high school level.

► **AIDT.** AIDT’s Total Workforce Delivery System provides customized workforce recruitment and training at no cost to the company. AIDT offers comprehensive pre-employment selection and training, leadership development, on-the-job training, maintenance assessments, and industrial safety assessments and training — all specific to the company’s needs. From lead time planning to program delivery, AIDT rallies its total in-house capabilities to deliver a quality workforce.

Here’s a look at financing incentives:

► **Industrial Development Grants.**

Local governments and authorities can receive state grants to help businesses with the cost of site preparation. These grants are available to industrial, warehousing and research firms or headquarters facilities for other types of firms.

► **Industrial Revenue Bonds.** Tax-exempt bonds up to \$10 million can be issued covering all or part of the cost of land and building acquisition, construction, furnishings and some soft costs.

► **Alabama Infrastructure Grant Program.** Helps finance water, sewer and road facilities.

► **Alabama Industrial Access Road and Bridge Program.** Helps finance the roads and bridges needed to connect public roads to industrial projects.

More Information: Alabama Department of Revenue, Alabama Department of Commerce and other state agencies.

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Commerce leads Alabama's economic development efforts

Alabama saw a record-breaking \$14.6 billion in industry capital investments in 2025. In all, 234 new projects and expansions that will add an expected 9,388 jobs across the state were announced.

At the center of those announcements are the Alabama Department of Commerce's economic development and job-creation strategies.

Commerce, led by Secretary Ellen McNair, spearheads efforts and collaborates with economic development allies and community partners throughout the state to secure high-impact business growth projects that deliver quality jobs for communities.

Commerce and the Alabama economic development team have built a consistent track record of winning game-changing projects that introduce important new dimensions to the state's evolving economy. As a result, site-selection consultants routinely recognize Alabama as a top state for doing business, and its economic development team has received numerous awards — most recently a 2026 Silver Shovel Award from Area Development.

In 2025, pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly and Company announced it will build a facility worth more than \$6 billion in Huntsville. Other major industries on the state's roster include Boeing, Airbus, Lockheed Martin, Austal, Meta Platforms, Google, Amazon and the five global automakers located in the state.

The state's two primary economic incentives are the Alabama Jobs Credit and the Alabama Investment Credit. The Jobs Credit gives a company a cash rebate



A rendering of the proposed Eli Lilly plant, a \$6 billion investment headed for Huntsville. Rendering courtesy of Eli Lilly.

on its previous year's payroll for qualified employees. Companies can get higher rebates if they locate in rural parts of the state or hire veterans. The Investment Credit pertains to a company's capital investment and can be applied to several taxes, including income.



Commerce will work with the governor and lawmakers in 2027 to extend the credits for several more years, as is

required by law.

Commerce's most recent recruitment efforts also have focused on industrial site preparation. The Growing Alabama Tax Credit and the Site Evaluation and Economic Development Strategy have put \$160.9 million and \$138.7 million, respectively, into site preparation in less than a decade.

And AIDT, Commerce's highly regarded workforce recruitment and training agency, is another key incentive the state offers new and expanding industries.

Other objectives are to attract domestic and foreign investment, expand international trade and Alabama exports, facilitate small business growth and attract film and music productions through the Alabama Entertainment Office.

Alabama companies exported goods and services worth \$23.7 billion to 190 countries in 2025. Meanwhile, there were \$3.6 billion in foreign direct investment projects in Alabama last year.

KEY CONTACT

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AIDT ALABAMA'S WORKFORCE TRAINING AGENCY

When companies choose Alabama, they gain more than just a location. They gain access to one of the world's strongest workforce training programs.

AIDT, a division of the Alabama Department of Commerce, has long been recognized among the nation's top workforce development programs. With ISO 9001:2015 certification for quality and continuous improvement, AIDT provides companies with a trusted partner to recruit, select and train employees. Over the last 55 years, AIDT has prepared more than 1 million job seekers for careers for more than 5,000 Alabama companies.

The result is a pipeline of highly skilled workers known for strong technical skills, professionalism and performance. Employers know that when their people are trained by AIDT, they are ready to succeed.

AIDT stays ahead of workforce trends through close collaboration with industry and education partners. Training solutions are continuously evolving, blending traditional hands-on learning with new technologies such as e-learning and virtual reality training.

From automotive and aerospace to logistics, warehousing and biomedical fields, AIDT designs customized preemployment programs to meet the needs of each company.



AIDT programs are tailored to the needs of specific industries, from complex wiring to the elements of today's smart factory. *Photos courtesy of AIDT.*

AIDT SERVICES DESIGNED FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS:

- ▶ **Skill & Criteria Development:** Define the knowledge, skills and performance standards your company needs.
- ▶ **Recruitment:** Identify and screen candidates who are the right fit for your organization.
- ▶ **Program Support:** Access instructors, equipment, training materials and supplies — provided at no cost to companies or trainees.
- ▶ **Pre-Employment Training:** Ensure

candidates are assessed for technical ability, teamwork, character, literacy and work ethic before they join your team.

A division of the Alabama Department of Commerce, AIDT also provides leadership development, on-the-job training, industrial maintenance assessments and industrial safety assessments. Leadership development conducted by AIDT is designed to develop and retain quality leaders, improve retention and create loyal and dedicated employees. Industrial main-

tenance and safety assessment services help identify candidates best qualified for effective and efficient operations through corrective and preventive maintenance.



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ADECA ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

ADECA connects communities with funding opportunities

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) distributes hundreds of millions of dollars annually to Alabama cities, counties, nonprofit organizations and others to support economic development projects, infrastructure improvements, job training, energy conservation, law enforcement, traffic safety, recreational development, high-speed internet expansion and electric vehicle infrastructure.

ADECA houses numerous programs that focus available resources to address a variety of local challenges.

Several ADECA grant programs help Alabama communities with economic development projects and enhance commerce either directly or indirectly:

► **Community Development Block Grants** are funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and support local government efforts to attract and prepare for new or expanding industries, rehabilitate low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, provide infrastructure services that include water, sewer, road paving and drainage services, and fund other infrastructure improvements that support business development and enhance the quality of life for area residents. Many of the funds are awarded annually on a competitive basis, but a portion of the allocation is kept in reserve for economic development infrastructure projects that help industries and businesses locate and expand in Alabama or for urgent-need infrastructure projects in response to catastrophic events. In 2025, ADECA received competitive applications from small cities, large cities, counties and planning organizations across Alabama, and the agency awarded grants for 44 projects totaling \$17 million, enabling local governments to address critical infrastructure needs. Fourteen grants worth a total of nearly \$5

million were awarded through ADECA's economic development CDBG program, and those funds were expended on local government infrastructure construction projects to address the needs of new businesses and industries.

► Grants from the **Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)** are awarded to encourage economic development and improve the quality of life of Alabamians living within 37 counties considered part of the Appalachian Region. Projects that develop and improve infrastructure and support education, workforce development and community development are funded through the program. In 2025, \$13.8 million was invested in 35 projects in ARC counties, helping to create or retain jobs and/or provide job training. An additional \$1.8 million in ARC funds was awarded for updates to existing projects.

► **Delta Regional Authority (DRA)** is another state-federal partnership that encourages the development of new jobs and helps with basic community improvements in an area that includes 20 counties primarily in the Black Belt region of Alabama. In 2025, ADECA partnered with DRA to fund eight projects totaling about \$3.7 million, creating or retaining many jobs and preparing others for jobs in new and demanding fields.

► The newer **Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC)** follows the model of the ARC and DRA programs to provide economic development and workforce training in 13 Alabama counties, primarily in southeast Alabama and Autauga, Baldwin, Lee, Montgomery and Mobile counties, which are not part of ARC or DRA. In 2025, the commission awarded five grants totaling \$2.1 million.

► Two recreational programs are managed by ADECA, the **Land and Water Conservation Fund** and the **Recreational**



At the Wilcox County Fiber event.
Photo courtesy of ADECA.

Trails Program, to provide funding for parks and recreational facilities. Many of those projects help attract tourists, aid local economies and improve quality of life. In 2025, ADECA awarded \$1.5 million for five Recreational Trails Program projects and \$7.5 million for 14 LWCF projects.

► ADECA's **Alabama Digital Expansion Division** was created to help expand the availability of high-speed internet service to unserved areas of Alabama. Under the banner of "Be Linked Alabama," several programs have been established from multiple funding sources to accomplish that task. State and federal funds have been used to provide middle- and last-mile projects to benefit households, businesses and public service operations that choose to be connected. In the past year, work continued throughout Alabama on projects supported by previously awarded grants. Grants from the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program totaling nearly \$460 million will support 63 projects to expand access to broadband service to approximately 92,000 currently unserved locations statewide.

► ADECA also helps manage the state's water resources, supports law enforcement and traffic safety efforts, and distributes state and federal surplus property.

KEY CONTACT

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ATN ALABAMA TRAINING NETWORK

Building a Stronger Workforce. Strengthening Alabama Business.



ATN sends experts into training facilities and workplaces to help businesses solve technical problems and advance competitiveness.
Photos courtesy of ATN.

The Alabama Training Network (ATN) delivers customized workforce training, technical assistance and industry-driven solutions that help Alabama businesses develop their people, strengthen operations, improve performance and remain competitive.

As part of the Alabama Community College System (ACCS), ATN works alongside Alabama's community colleges and other workforce and economic development partners to connect employers with the expertise and resources they need. With 62 specialists serving employers statewide, ATN provides more than 240 training solutions tailored to each organization's specific needs.

ATN's expertise spans five primary areas: Advanced Manufacturing & Technology, Agribusiness & Food

Services, Continuous Improvement, Environmental Health & Safety and Leadership & Management Development. From developing stronger leaders and improving workplace safety to implementing technologies, increasing efficiency, strengthening quality systems and building technical skills, ATN helps organizations address challenges while preparing their workforce for what's next.

While manufacturing remains at the heart of ATN's mission, its expertise supports organizations across a wide range of industries throughout Alabama.

Based on 1,962 client surveys from 2015 to 2025, ATN clients reported:

- ▶ 4,957 new jobs created
- ▶ 21,565 jobs retained
- ▶ \$3.2 billion in increased and retained sales

- ▶ \$835 million in new client investments
- ▶ \$967 million in cost savings

Total Impact:

- ▶ 26,522 jobs created or retained
- ▶ \$5 billion in reported client economic impact

Beyond training and technical assistance, ATN partners with the Business Council of Alabama and Manufacture Alabama to present the Alabama Manufacturer of the Year Awards, celebrating the companies, people and innovation driving Alabama's manufacturing industry forward.

Whether the need is workforce development, leadership, safety, quality or operational improvement, ATN brings the right expertise to the table and helps Alabama organizations train, grow and compete.

KEY CONTACT

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EDAA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION OF ALABAMA

EDAA unites professionals committed to Alabama's economic development



An Autocar E-ACCT at work at APM Terminals at the Port of Mobile. *Photo courtesy of Autocar.*

Economic development can have a multitude of meanings, but at its core, it is a collaborative effort among businesses, communities, organizations and government agencies. Since 1968, the Economic Development Association of Alabama (EDAA) has facilitated that collaboration to both attract new investment to the state and work to expand those companies that are already located here. EDAA provides a forum for discussion of specific issues affecting economic development and provides

programming and training to cultivate expertise in Alabama's economic developers.

The EDAA membership consists of 600 individuals involved in economic development from many different areas and disciplines. EDAA members are economic development professionals, attorneys, engineers, architects, state agency personnel, utility employees, bankers, contractors, real estate agents, educators and municipal and county officials.

SERVICES

A voluntary member association, EDAA conducts workshops and seminars covering the ideas, principles, practices and ethics of economic development. Most of the EDAA educational programs focus on enhancing the skills of economic development professionals by providing them with new tools to address the challenge of remaining one of the nation's top states in economic development. EDAA holds multiple networking opportunities, publishes a

membership directory, conducts two major conferences each year and holds quarterly workshops.

EDAA is diligent in addressing state and federal legislative and regulatory issues impacting economic development in Alabama. With a full-time lobbying presence when the Alabama Legislature is in session, EDAA is a leader in forming economic development policy and legislation for its members. Legislative efforts on the state level in recent years have seen EDAA lobby for competitive and sustainable economic development incentives and adequate funding for state recruitment efforts and worker training programs. In addition to its legislative efforts in support of positive economic development policies, EDAA endeavors to defeat legislation that would pose a threat to Alabama's economic development effort and actively seeks innovative solutions to challenges that could negatively impact the state's business climate.

PARTNERSHIPS

In addition, EDAA works with other organizations in the state to improve Alabama's economic development environment. Strategic alliances with the Alabama Department of Commerce, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs and the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama enable EDAA to provide its membership with substantive skills and resources.

EDAA is also a partner with Auburn University's Government and Economic Development Institute (GEDI) in conducting the Economic Development Leadership Institute.

The EDAA Leadership Institute represents a partnership between EDAA and GEDI to educate and engage elected officials, economic development board members and other community leaders about key issues in economic and community development.

KEY CONTACT

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EDPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP OF ALABAMA

EDPA works to enhance Alabama's competitiveness and make the state an appealing destination for both established and emerging businesses

For more than 30 years, the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama (EDPA) has been a catalyst for economic growth in the state. A private, nonprofit organization supported by Alabama's leading businesses, EDPA is uniquely positioned to partner with state, local and private allies to drive the state's economic development efforts.

EDPA'S FIVE PILLARS

EDPA's program of work today is focused on five pillars:

- 1. Lead Generation:** Identify and target leading companies that are good prospects to bring quality jobs and investment to the state.
- 2. Business Intelligence and Economic Development Research:** Support both lead generation and business attraction efforts through business intelligence, data and analytics.
- 3. Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** Provide resources and support to startup companies that have high-growth potential.
- 4. Talent Attraction and Retention:** Work to attract and retain the talent needed to support economic growth.
- 5. Statewide Economic Development Policy:** Promote existing policies and shape future policies key to Alabama's economic success.

SITE EVALUATION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (SEEDS)

SEEDS is a matching grant program governed by the State Industrial Development Authority (SIDA). The EDPA is proud to administer the groundbreaking SEEDS program — a key portion of Gov. Kay Ivey's "Game Plan" package of economic development bills approved by the Legislature in early 2024 — which takes direct aim at the urgent need for quality industrial sites in Alabama at a time when other states are spending heavily to expand their site programs.

ALABAMA LAUNCHPAD

EDPA also has been a statewide leader in encouraging innovation, commercialization

and entrepreneurship. The mission of EDPA's Alabama Launchpad program is to help high-growth companies start, stay and grow in Alabama through its business pitch competition.

Alabama Launchpad is the state's most active, early-stage investor and drives innovation and job growth through three startup competitions annually, offering non-dilutive funding along with mentoring and other services. Since its launch in 2006, Alabama Launchpad has invested \$7.1 million in 126 startups, fueling job creation, economic growth and innovation across the state. Collectively, these companies have generated more than 1,600 jobs and surpassed \$1 billion in combined valuation. The competition, now featuring larger funding opportunities, will award up to \$100,000 in non-dilutive funding to winning startups. Finalists will compete within their designated industry tracks, pitching their ventures to exclusive investor committees in a closed-door setting designed to prepare them for future conversations with investors or customers.

Building on that momentum, EDPA also connects growth-stage Alabama companies with corporate partners for funded pilot projects through PilotAL, one of EDPA's lead generation tools, supported by Innovate Alabama through 2027.

TALENT

With private sector engagement and strong public sector ties, EDPA leverages its relationships across industries to facilitate talent retention efforts with local and state government, colleges and universities, and companies. This collaborative effort, called Fuel Alabama (FuelAL), focuses on making sure Alabama has the competitive talent necessary for continued growth. Since its launch in 2021, EDPA has hosted statewide summits, conducted research alongside the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, and connected thousands of students to communities across the state through FuelAL's summer, school-year and historically Black colleges and universities programs.

Each of these components of Fuel Alabama connects communities, employers and talent — the pivotal intersection that could change Alabama's ability to both retain and attract the talent the state needs.

In an effort to diversify the pipeline of tech talent and create opportunities for underserved populations in the tech sector, EDPA, in partnership with Innovate Alabama, continues to grow its FuelAL HBCU Innovation Internship, which now spans Alabama's HBCUs with cohorts each spring and fall.

Each cohort builds on the program's growing base of employer partners, placing students with startups, accelerators and innovation hubs across the state. EDPA also supports Alabama Power's Alabama Talent Solutions (ATS) activations, a mobile, digital outreach initiative showcasing Alabama career, education and lifestyle opportunities to residents and visitors. ATS is committed to changing individual lives in Alabama by connecting them with meaningful employment opportunities and hosts pop-up events throughout various communities, workforce and organizations across the state.

ALABAMA BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE CENTER

To support statewide efforts for the recruitment and retention of business in Alabama, EDPA launched the Alabama Business Intelligence Center (AL Intel) in June of 2022. Today, AL Intel supports statewide economic development organizations and other stakeholders by providing business intelligence for leads and projects. Examples include robust industry research, company due diligence, research for target identification and identifying executive-level contacts. This includes proactive steps to derive insights and analysis from industries and businesses that meet Alabama's value propositions — further supporting the research efforts of site consultants, corporate and community economic developers and the Alabama Department of Commerce.

KEY CONTACT

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A WORKFORCE INVESTMENT THAT PAYS LIFESAVING DIVIDENDS.

At the Alabama Community College System, we combine real-world training and classroom instruction to prepare students for Alabama's most in-demand jobs. By listening to businesses and industries, we launch programs and training that align directly with workforce needs. As the state's largest training network, we keep talent here at home — building businesses, strengthening communities, and driving local economies forward.

Here we go.

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ALABAMA
COMMUNITY
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When fast & flexible training didn't exist, WE BUILT IT

72,000+ participants enrolled and counting. Training in days and weeks, not years.

Every employer knows the gap between the workforce you need and the trained workers you can find. The ACCS Innovation Center (IC) builds training that closes the gap for Alabama business and industry – **FAST**.

Skills for Success

Hands-on training built with hiring employers, producing job-ready participants in days or weeks. Cost-free options available, delivered statewide through Alabama's community colleges.

Navigate

Online courses in career exploration, financial literacy, and life skills that meet participants where they are, built in collaboration with Alabama's community colleges.

RAISE

Worksite-based upskilling for your existing team, built by the IC and delivered on-site through a partnership with the Alabama Training Network (ATN).

State Partnerships

Custom online training built by the IC for state agencies and organizations, delivered directly to meet mandates like the Alabama Municipal Official Training Act.

The ACCS Innovation Center is bridging the gap with efficiency and expertise, training Alabama to thrive.

Ready to close the gap for your team, your district, or your industry? Connect with us at TrainForAlabama.com.





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Butler Snow's economic development team has represented a large and diverse group of data center, manufacturing, energy, processing, distribution, warehousing, health care and other enterprises.

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