

Landing Eurocopter Required Team Approach

Putting aside differences big step in luring industry.

With communities vying for high paying companies, it is natural to be competitive with your neighbors; but, regional cooperation and coordination make everyone more successful. The Mississippi Crescent Initiative, sponsored by TVA, the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University, is a great example of teamwork in economic development.

In January 2001, TVA Chairman Glenn McCullough, Jr., University of Mississippi Chancellor Robert Khayat, and former Mississippi State University President Malcolm Portera met to discuss economic development and how it relates to the state's universities and colleges. They decided to use the substantial research capabilities of their respective institutions to impact economic development for the citizens of Mississippi.

Birth of the Initiative

From that initial discussion, the Mississippi Crescent Initiative began. Over the next several months, educators, economic development professionals, state and local government officials, community leaders, private business and industry executives, power distributors, and others met to discuss key issues in the state and potential strategies to address them. As the process evolved, the Crescent encompassed a 34-county area of northeast Mississippi.

The Crescent Initiative identified three goals: recruiting, expansion, and entrepreneurship. Through the efforts of the Crescent, aviation-related firms were targeted for recruitment. Given the proximity to the Columbus Air Force Base and the Rasmussen Flight Research Laboratory, aviation was a natural choice for the area. Through the collaborative efforts of the team, north Mississippi was successful in attracting American Eurocopter.

Eurocopter Lands

Nick Ardillo, executive director of the Golden Triangle Regional Airport, said the Crescent Initiative was the key to landing Eurocopter. "There's no doubt that it took a lot of work by a lot of different people to make it happen, including the folks working on the Crescent Initiative. A full eight months before Eurocopter announced its intention to come to Mississippi, we started talking about how our area was a prime spot for an aerospace firm. If we hadn't gotten a headstart with the Crescent Initiative, I don't know what would have happened."

Chuck Howell, general manager of

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Pontotoc Electric Power Association, Pontotoc, MS, also serves on the steering committee, and says the Eurocopter project proves the success of the program.

"We knew what Eurocopter was looking for in terms of what kind of area that they wanted and we examined our resources in each county. We, as a steering committee, laid aside any selfish preferences we had about wanting the company in our own areas and looked objectively at the right place for Eurocopter," Howell said. "It became clear very quickly that the place for Eurocopter was the Golden Triangle."

On Oct. 24, Eurocopter announced that its U.S. subsidiary, American Eurocopter Corp. would construct a facility in the Mississippi Golden Triangle (Starkville, Columbus, and West Point) adjacent to the Golden Triangle Regional Airport. Eurocopter is a wholly owned subsidiary of EADS - European Aeronautics Defense & Space - one of the world's leaders in aerospace and defense.

American Eurocopter will be located in a 100,000 square foot facility on 40 acres in Lowndes County with an option to expand to an additional 47 acres. The company will manufacture components for helicopters serving commercial and homeland security markets.

American Eurocopter plans to employ 100 people with an annual payroll of \$5 million, and the total capital investment for the project is \$12 million. The plant has projected an annual economic impact of \$17 million.

Regional Cooperation

The announcement by American Eurocopter to locate in the Golden Triangle illustrates the benefits of regional cooperation in economic development. Leaders from the Crescent area hope to use the project's success to stimulate further economic growth.

Although the Crescent's industrial recruitment efforts have had the most success, other committees are also making a difference in entrepreneurship and existing industry. The entrepreneurship committee has identified gaps in technical assistance, specifically venture capital. They have developed a CD-ROM for entrepreneurs. A comprehensive inventory of existing programs and services for industry has also been compiled.

The Crescent is truly a collaborative approach for economic development. By working together, sharing resources, and identifying shared goals, we can stimulate economic growth. Economic development is a people business, and some of the most important relationships that we can have are with our neighbors. #

Teresa Taylor is a specialist for strategic initiatives in TVA Economic Development and works in Nashville, TN.