



GREATER GRENADA
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Growth *and* Success



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Written by Robert Hoshowsky

Named after southern Spain's province of Granada, Mississippi's historic Grenada County is earning a reputation for its many business success stories, entrepreneurial growth, workforce training and development, available land and resources for development, and a great deal more.

Grenada County Economic Development District (GCEDD) staff and board of directors, driven by Greater Grenada Partnership (GGP) Executive Director Matthew Harrison, are working to attract viable industrial employers to the area, develop and implement plans for broad economic growth, and coordinate and collaborate with other groups and government to bring jobs and revenue to Grenada County.

The GCEDD is Grenada's leading economic development organization. Prior to starting with the economic development agency in November 2017, Harrison's lengthy career was spent working with corporate entities such as Toyota Motor Manufacturing and Mercedes Benz USA. Other dedicated staff members include Vice President of Community Development Janie Mortimer, Executive Advisor of Chamber Development Wanda Thompson, and Project Management and Leadership Assistant Laura Adkins.

The economic development agency and the chamber of commerce were created in 1947 to concentrate on community economic development and were renamed about a decade ago.

"In 2010, the chamber and economic development agencies separated to enact different focal strategies, which is not

uncommon in larger communities," states Harrison. "When I came on board in 2017, I was solely responsible for the economic development agency with a focus on industrial development and existing industry expansion. However, I have always seen economic development as a community event. It takes a community in order for economic development to occur. Without a vibrant and growing community, economic development results will be stifled."

"The goal is to build a 'one-stop shop' for all development-related items with an emphasis on regionalism."

Before relocating to a community, industries may have specific requirements, including walkability, bike lanes, public transportation, and other community development programs that would benefit employees. Another factor in deciding where to go is the workforce pipeline. Areas of the country that have an educated population witness an increase in economic development activity and get the attention of site developers.

These items prompted Harrison to reconsider the mission of the economic development agency. This coincided with the Grenada Area Chamber of Commerce reaching out to him to discuss a potential partnership, as it saw similar trends in development. After considerable review, research, and benchmarking of successful organizations, the Greater Grenada Partnership (GGP) was born. ►►



Matthew Harrison
Executive Director of Greater
Grenada Partnership (GGP)



“The goal is to build a ‘one-stop shop’ for all development-related items with an emphasis on regionalism,” says Harrison. “Rural communities work better together. Actually, all communities work better together.”

“To date, about twenty-five percent of the workforce is employed in manufacturing.”

Between Jackson, Mississippi and Memphis, Tennessee, Grenada County is just a few hours’ drive along Interstate 55 to major markets in New Orleans, Dallas, St. Louis, Atlanta, and the lower Mississippi’s Port of Rosedale. The area connects to short-line rail, which has access to all Class 1 rail lines in America and is also served by the Grenada Municipal Airport.

As a regional hub and a micropolitan community, Grenada County draws its workforce from over 250,000 people in the area’s labor pool. Combined with being centrally located between Memphis, Tennessee and Jackson, Mississippi, this gives employers the advantage of access to over two million residents. To date, about twenty-five percent of the workforce is employed in manufacturing.

- ▶ The move brought the Chamber and GCEDD into a formal partnership centered on community economic development. The GGP’s mandate includes quality of life, community place-making, housing, healthcare, talent retention and attraction, business expansion, and industrial recruitment. It also forms regional alliances with neighboring counties, local and regional economic development agencies, state and federal partners and local community stakeholders.

Within a hundred-mile radius, Grenada County has nine universities and fourteen community college campuses, representing over 80,000 students. To help create workers for future jobs, over \$4.5 million was raised by local industries for a state-of-the-art workforce training complex at Holmes Community College. The complex aims to provide local and regional training to existing or new industries and has trained thousands of students and existing workers for the region.

"Holmes has been an active partner in training automotive manufacturing professionals for corporations such as Nissan in Canton, Mississippi," says Harrison. "They have trained over sixty thousand regional students for the industry."

In Batesville, Mississippi, a second workforce training center is in the works, in collaboration with Northwest Mississippi Community College, to provide more career skill growth options for students. "On top of that, Holmes Community College in Grenada, Mississippi continues to work with our local high school, which is a District of Innovation, to provide further medical training for our student base. It's an exciting time for the region!" The Department of Education's District of Innovation title gives school districts the flexibility to develop creative programs.

Along with offering multiple workforce training programs, a prime location, and low operating costs, Grenada County has ample industrial development land. The over-1,200-acre Business and Technology Park North has all utilities in place, interstate access, rail spurs, and water towers, an 84,000-square-foot speculative facility, and three pad-ready sites ranging from 60,000 square feet to 500,000 square feet. The Air Industrial park consists of 1,700 acres with one of the longest runways in the state at 7,500 feet. "Not many communities can showcase this type of ready-to-market land," says Harrison.

Another factor attracting businesses to Grenada County is its favorable tax structure, making it one of the top places in the Mississippi Delta to do business. "Our goal is to provide every opportunity for our industrial partners to be successful by making a sound cost of business choice," comments Harrison. "If you are a business seeking a location or expansion, you should definitely check out Grenada County."

Using world-renowned automobile manufacturer Toyota's production system of continuous improvement, Harrison and Associate Professor of Economic Development Chad Miller came up with a platform called the Harrison Target Approach (HTA).

"After working with economic development agencies, I realized that many of them had 'target markets' that did not actually fit the regional or local economic market," notes Harrison. ►



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► “Then, to make matters worse, they would spend thousands of dollars going after clients that would never locate in their communities. They also had more data than could ever be parsed out into a real decision-making process.”

A system was needed to determine which markets would be beneficial to both the community and industry. After determining which markets would work best for the region, Harrison needed to have a system to grade the best opportunities, allowing him to spend limited resources on opportunities that statistically increase the likelihood of a viable prospect. “Hence, the HTA was created,” he says. In keeping with the Japanese system that inspired it, there are plans to update the approach as needed.

From social media to hardcopy marketing, drone use, professional development conferences and consultant visits, Harrison and his team are using every tool possible to promote the county. The team is identifying target markets and tailoring messages to each potential client. To promote the Greater Grenada Partnership as a regionally-inclusive economic development platform, Harrison is seeking as many partners as possible to create a region of sustainable success.

“Our communities are all integrally linked in both success and failure,” he says. “As a team, we possess the skills, the workforce



talent, the amenities, and opportunities to develop our version of economic success. Our growth depends on our collaboration. This is somewhat new in rural economic development. There is so much world-wide competition; it has now become imperative that communities use their collective strengths to position themselves for advancement."

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Many types of businesses call Grenada County home, including plastics manufacturing, food processing, automotive, and aerospace. Several unique success stories are centered on entrepreneurial industrial growth like industrial and residential HVAC system companies Modine Manufacturing Company, formerly Luvata, and Advanced Distributor Products. The two now employ over three thousand people in the region.

GGP's analysis determined that many jobs will be in the medical field. Like other communities, Grenada County faces the challenge of finding how to provide work opportunities that will keep its educated young people in the community after graduating. With that in mind, the GGP has launched an initiative to improve its selection of regional medical education programs, community development interactions with a medical subject, a high-school-to-college medical program, and new business recruitment targeting medical jobs.



For years, Mississippi communities have been overlooked in the development process, but Harrison is working hard to change that and encourages businesses considering a new location to view all that a community such as Grenada County offers, from available skilled workers to land for development, industrial parks, skills development, and more.

"Most companies are amazed at the level of technology, skills, business incentives, and opportunities that are found here," he says. "We work to stay tuned-in to the needs that our industries have and are continually improving. Maybe this is due to all of the automotive influences such as Nissan, Toyota, Continental, Yokohama, Grammer, and others. Whatever the case, if organizations such as these world-known brands found Mississippi a great business decision, maybe we are truly a hidden gem." ■

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