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Sunday, May 22, 2022



Jabreka Dancy welds at Plum Creek Environmental.
Photo by Deanna Robinson/Dispatch Staff

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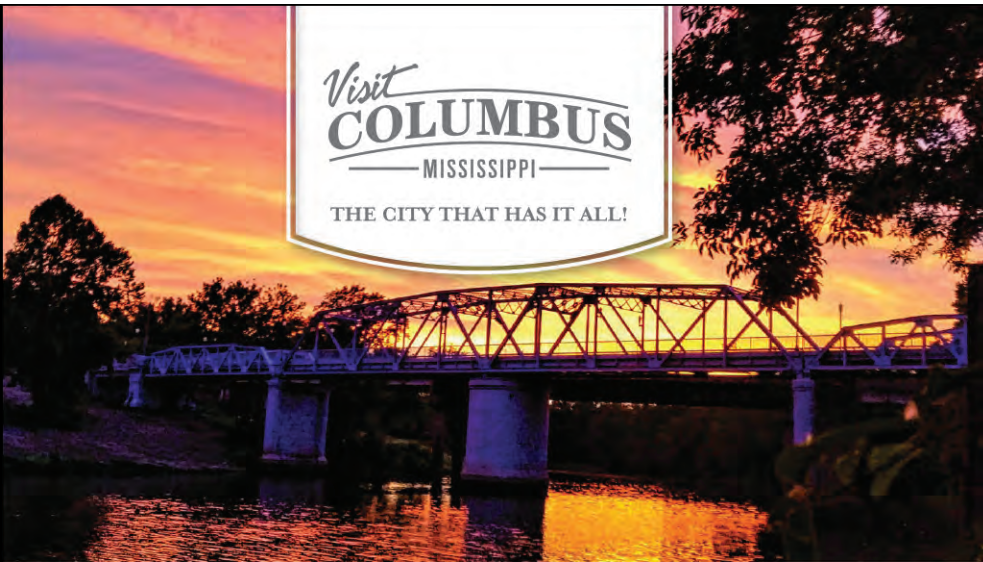


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New FedEx distribution center to open later this year

\$50M investment will create 100-plus jobs

BY BRIAN JONES | bjones@cdspatch.com

A FedEx Ground distribution center at the Golden Triangle Industrial Park should be complete later this year, according to Golden Triangle Development LINK CEO Joe Max Higgins.

The project will replace the two smaller buildings on South Frontage Road with a much larger distribution center.

"I think they'll be done by late summer, maybe early fall," Higgins said. "They've got the exterior of the building about done, and everything is going well."

The building is only about half of the total investment, Higgins said.

"The guesstimate we had was about \$25 million for the building, but then the stuff that goes inside is maybe a little more or a little less than that," Higgins said. "Conservatively I'm thinking \$50 million in value."

The project was announced in October 2021. The new distribution center is located on about 41 acres off of Charleigh Ford Drive, near Golden Triangle Regional Airport. LINK Vice President for Economic Development Meryl Fisackerly estimated it will be between 217,000 and 235,000 square feet.

"To put that into perspective, the current facility is one building that's about 20,000 square feet and another that is 7,000 to 8,000," she said. "Combined, they're not even at 30,000 square feet."

Lowndes County Board of Supervisors President Trip Hairston said there's no downside for the county.

"This is a vast expansion for (FedEx's) operation," Hairston said. "That means more ad valorem tax revenue for the county, because they'll be paying taxes on that building and the equipment in it. The expanded operations there will also create jobs."

Higgins estimated the center will create upwards of a hundred jobs.

"Conservatively, I'm going to say about 150 jobs," he said. "Realistically it'll probably be more like 200."

Hairston also pointed out that the old



Photo courtesy of Golden Triangle Development Link

The new 200,000-plus-square-foot FedEx Ground center is under construction off of Charleigh Ford Drive. It is expected to open later this year.

FedEx buildings will become available for a new tenant.

"It creates an opportunity for those old buildings to be used for something else," Hairston said. "A growing business could go in there and use it, so it creates an opportunity for growth for another business."

The distribution center is part of a growing trend towards e-commerce, which, in turn, provides tax money. A portion of sales tax collected via online sales comes back to the county for use on roads and bridges, Hairston explained.

"We get (use tax) revenues to the tune of \$1 million per year," he said.

Distribution centers similar to this one are common nationally, but somewhat uncommon here, Higgins said.

"Some places it's their bread and butter," Higgins said. "For us, not so much. But with the pandemic, people started ordering more and more online. The need

for these centers became more frequent, and I think there's going to be more and more of those. For example, we worked with Amazon last year; it just didn't make. That doesn't mean it won't make in the future."

The footprint for the Lowndes County center is smaller than might be expected, Higgins said.

"That center serves to the state line to the east and maybe to Winona or so to the west," he said. "I never asked north or south, but if the east/west is just that far, you're not talking about a hell of a big footprint you're going to serve. That shows me how much e-commerce has increased in our part of the world."

If the demand continues to grow, Higgins said there is room for the FedEx site to expand with it.

"(The Lowndes County Industrial Development Authority) has a gentleman's agreement with them that they won't put

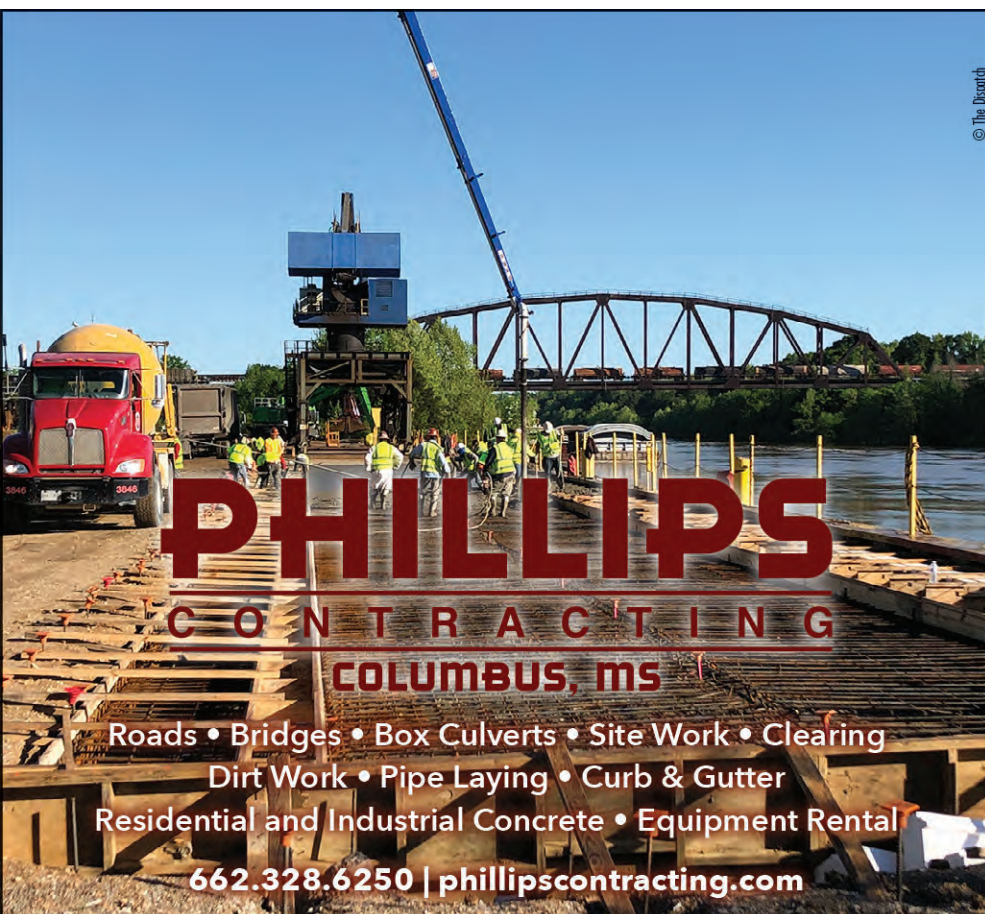
anybody on the land beside them for a certain period of time," Higgins said.

FedEx, in a statement sent via email to The Dispatch, said the Golden Triangle was chosen because of its ease of access to the highway network.

"The site was chosen because of its ease of access to major highways, proximity to customers' distribution centers and a strong local community workforce for recruiting employees," the statement said.

In addition to both full- and part-time jobs, it will also employ contractors.

"The company also will contract for package pickup and delivery services with service provider businesses that hire locally for driver, helper, manager and other positions," the statement said. "We continue to experience significant package volume due to e-commerce growth and are optimizing the capacity of our network to meet growing demand for our services."



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Plum Creek expansion exceeds expectations

Waste container manufacturer more than doubles employment over past six months

BY SLIM SMITH | ssmith@cdispatch.com

Last November, the family-owned West Point company, Plum Creek Environmental, which manufactures waste containers and recycling equipment, took advantage of a rebate program from the Mississippi Development Authority to help defray costs of a \$3 million expansion.

Six months later, the company has far exceeded expectations.

"What this expansion allowed us to do is buy a 60,000 square-foot building across the street from us so that we could increase production," said Plum Creek founder and president Jim Wamble.

"We've more than doubled our production," said Mike Wamble, the compa-



Frankie Doss puts the finishing touches on a dumpster at Plum Creek in West Point.

Deanna Robinson/Dispatch Staff

ny's director of sales.

The expansion has not only significantly increased the company's top line, it has also created jobs, which was the focus of the MDA's Mississippi Advantage Jobs Incentive Program. The program provides a

cash rebate for up to 10 years to qualified employers willing to commit to wages higher than the regional average.

At the time it applied, Plum Creek said it could create 50 new jobs.

"So far, we've hired nearly 100 new

employees," Jim Wamble said. The company had 70 employees at the time it partnered with the states on the expansion.

"I think at the time, like a lot of companies, we were a little concerned about being able to find workers, so our estimates were lower than we hoped," Mike Wamble said. "We just weren't sure."

Plum Creek was founded in Columbus in 2007 but relocated to West Point for a larger facility in 2016. The company has grown from one employee to 170 in its 15 years, more than doubling its workforce in the past six months alone.

In urban areas, creating 100 new jobs in six months might hardly cause a stir.

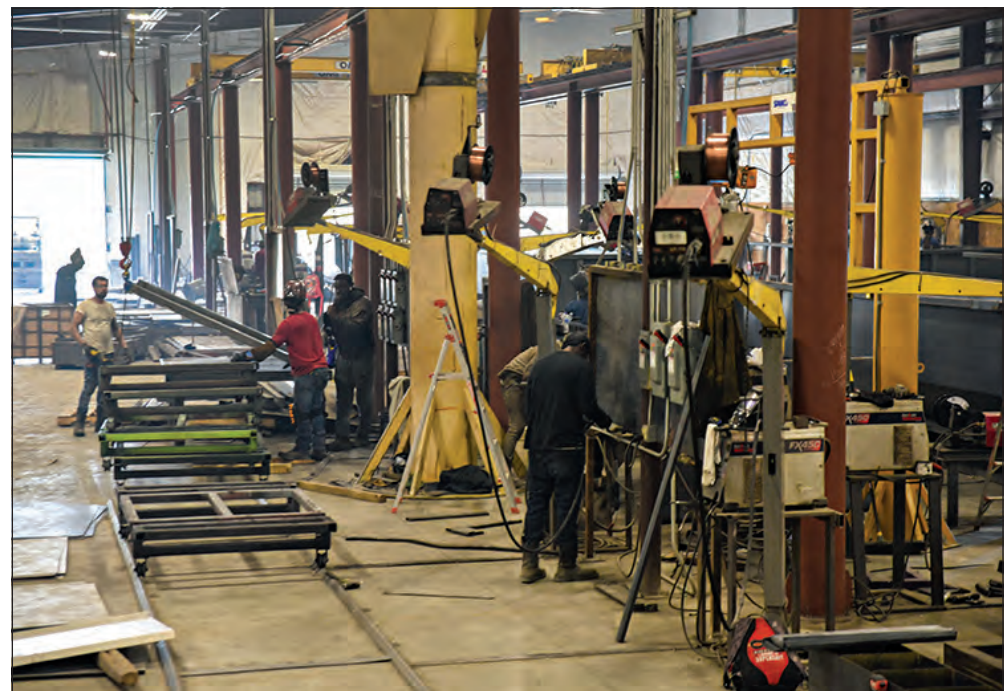
But in West Point, those jobs have a huge impact, Mayor Rod Bobo said.

"Plum Creek has always been what I would consider a community partner," said Bobo, who was elected in June 2021. "I know they've been very cordial with me since I came into office. It's just phenomenal the job creation they've produced. I've talked to a lot of their employees and they're all happy there. It's a good place to work with good wages. I also think it says something very positive about our workforce here. We're so appreciative that Plum Creek recognizes that."



Deanna Robinson/Dispatch Staff

Matthew Narmour looks on as Ericson Marble welds on the assembly line at Plum Creek.



Deanna Robinson/Dispatch Staff

The assembly line at Plum Creek in West Point puts together waste containers.

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North Star Industrial Park prepares for new industries

New speculative buildings going up more than a year after Garan becomes park occupant

BY JESSICA LINDSEY | jlindsey@cdispach.com

Garan Manufacturing has been the sole occupant of North Star Industrial Park for a little more than a year, but the Golden Triangle Development LINK is looking to give Garan a few neighbors soon.

Joe Max Higgins, chief executive officer for the LINK, said plans are to build nine and 10 buildings at North Star, located off Highway 389 in Starkville. Currently the LINK is working on finishing the slab for a 50,000 square-foot speculative building across from Garan, and the materials for that building arrived on site the week of May 9.

"We've got \$3.4 million in a grant from the state of Mississippi to do further enhancements to the park," Higgins said. "We're going to start clearing the trees and vegetation and knocking the hills off. We've got a 50,000 square-foot building that is expandable up to 100,000, and right next to it we're going to put a 100,000 square-foot building. In that park where Garan is on the north side, we envision there will be about four buildings of about 100,000 square feet down the south side and probably three or four on the north side. We also have the flat spot to develop, and we've actually got a company looking at it right now."

Garan houses administrative offices, engineers and the company's information technology department at North Star. The location also specializes in making patterns and samples for the children's clothing the company as a whole sells, known as Garanimals.

Although Garan's corporate headquarters are in New York City, its manufacturing arm has been headquartered in Starkville since 1964 at its former location on Highway 12. In March 2021, Garan permanently moved to a new building that accommodates the needs of business and the 120 employees in a more modern setting.

"At this building, we are support for all of our manufacturing entities throughout the world," manufacturing manager Greg Fuller said of the North Star plant. "We make samples here, we make patterns here and we have all of our compliance and regulatory staff here. We also have our distribution vice president here, and they support our distribution efforts and centers across the United States."

Howard Linzy, vice president for corporate human resources, said though the former building was bigger, the extra space did not necessarily mean more room to function. He also said Garan is ready to welcome a new neighbor whenever the next industry makes its way to North Star.

"Our workforce here is very glad to be in a new building, a very fresh, modern environment," Linzy said. "It's smaller than what we had before, but we didn't



Jessica Lindsey/Dispatch Staff

Garan Manufacturing is the first occupant of North Star Industrial Park off Highway 389 in Starkville, and the employees officially moved into the new facility in March 2021. While the clothing company's manufacturing headquarters is the only occupant of the park, there are two projects in the works to add speculative buildings to the park. Eventually, the park could host space for up to 10 industries.

really need a lot of unused space. It was very dated. We now have a much more pleasant working environment."

Once the 50,000 square-foot building is up across from Garan, the LINK will add a 100,000 square-foot building thanks to grants from the state of Mississippi. Higgins said the purpose of the, hopefully, temporarily empty buildings are to entice industries to come to Starkville.

The LINK recruits businesses in three different ways: through the Mississippi Development Authority, through the Tennessee Valley Authority and through its own "off-the-street" efforts, Higgins said. In order to attract new businesses and industry to the area, the LINK must have options available to businesses, and Higgins said the North Star Industrial Park is a prime location.

"Deals will come in; we had one here last week that was another (one) that we found," Higgins said. "A com-

pany came from up north looking at expanding down south to be near the automotive car corridor. (It's a) \$25 to 30 million project with 60 to 70 jobs. We met with them, showed them sites, including North Star. Once (a business) says they like what they see, we start working with them and bring in our partners, civil engineers to calculate cost and building plans."

Once those things are done, the LINK sends a company an incentive package. Then it finds the source and use of funds and speaks with the legislature. Higgins is hoping to bring in electric vehicle battery manufacturers and more automotive supply companies because of the proximity of the Golden Triangle to Nissan, Toyota and Mercedes facilities.

In a perfect world, Higgins said he would like to have the park full within the next year, but realistically he is looking at having it full within the next 15 to 20 years.

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