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About the cover

Stacy Edwards welds metal at the Columbia Industries plant at 101 Airport Road in Starkville. The company began operating out of the former Gulf States building in January and are currently in the process of moving headquarters to Starkville from Oregon, where the company is currently based. *Photo by Grant McLaughlin/Dispatch Staff*

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Columbia Industries: newest manufacturer on the block

Company is moving HQ from Oregon to Starkville

BY GRANT MCLAUGHLIN
grant@cdispatch.com

When Columbia Industries President Tom Moss and his team looked for a new location to move their manufacturing business, they first turned to West Point.

But after a deal to purchase the former Flexible Flyer building went sideways, Moss and the company landed on the former Gulf States building at 101 Airport Road in Starkville. Along with manufacturing operations, the company is moving its headquarters to Starkville in the next six months.

"We initially looked at West Point in a building, and we couldn't come to an agreement with the owner of that property," Moss said. "So we moved on and within a week, we landed on this property."

Moss said the company has been looking to leave Oregon, where it has been based for more than 40 years, due to what he described as increased hostility toward large businesses from the state government. He said a place like Starkville fits the relationship he wants to have with both the state and local municipalities.

"One of our key goals is to work in a local market that's driven to accept business," Moss said. "Oregon today, where we are, is not really what's considered a business-friendly environment, unfortunately. So we were looking for a partner, if you will, from the state so when we start manufacturing, we can count on the state not to change its mind on things."

Columbia Industries was found-



ABOVE: Cameron Smith attaches a metal piece to a Tipper frame at Columbia Industries. Columbia Industries began operating out of the former Gulf States building in January, but that was just the latest company to utilize a vacant industrial building in Starkville. There are three others Golden Triangle LINK and the city are currently marketing.

RIGHT: A Columbia Industries employee welds metal at the company plant at 101 Airport Road in Starkville.

ed in the late 1940s as a trailer manufacturing business. In 1977, the company sold that part of its business and began making solid waste tippers, which are like giant trash cans that use hydraulic

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Photos by Grant McLaughlin/Dispatch Staff

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Vacant buildings in Starkville ready for new industry players

Available space key to recruiting businesses

BY GRANT MCLAUGHLIN
grant@cdspatch.com

Now that Columbia Industries has begun operations at the former Gulf States building at 101 Airport Road in Starkville, three other vacant sites sit poised for potential development.

Those left include the former Flexsteel site, which consists of two buildings totaling 200,000 square feet, the CURiO building, a 62,00 square-foot light industrial building and the speculative building located at the NorthStar Industrial Park across from Garan Manufacturing, a 50,000 square-foot space with room to grow to 100,000 if needed.

Golden Triangle Development LINK CEO Joe Max Higgins told The Dispatch the buildings left

for developers in Starkville have a range of potential in several area industries. The advantage they all have is that developers are usually looking for vacant industrial space.

“Those are probably our top three buildings that we think we can put somebody in,” Higgins said. “... A lot of companies that are looking will first ask for an existing building because number one, you are bound to be cheaper, certainly with the construction costs now, to build one is expensive. So it is not uncommon for when we get an RFP, they first prefer an existing building.”

Positioning a building for a buyer

Higgins added that knowing what those buildings can accommodate in size is also an essential factor in recruitment. Buildings with 20 to 30 feet high ceilings such as the speculative building and Flexsteel buildings would be

‘We’ve got people that want to buy the building, but the owner of the company will not give their Realtor a sale price. ... A good, older, industrial building for \$3 a foot, maybe \$4 a foot would be a decent price.’

Joe Max Higgins, Golden Triangle Development LINK CEO

good for mid-sized companies.

“We’ve had distribution look at it, we’ve had manufacturing, we’ve had food-related products like drinks and bottling look at it,” Higgins said. “So it’s been the scoop of nuts.”

As far as Flexsteel specifically, Higgins said working with the owners of the buildings on price per square foot will be necessary before a buyer can come forward for that, though it would make a good location for light manufacturing at the right price.

“We’ve got people that want to buy the building, but the owner of the company will not give their Realtor a sale price,” he said. “... A

good, older, industrial building for \$3 a foot, maybe \$4 a foot would be a decent price.”

For CURiO, Higgins said high-end manufacturing is unlikely there, but its storage use does have potential, and LINK will definitely show it. It also has the benefit of being a cheaper option for manufacturers and is already industrially zoned.

“A ‘shaded shelter’ building is how I would categorize it,” he said, referring to the property’s relative lack of amenities. “Is there somebody out there that could use that building? Absolutely, because it’ll be a relatively inex-

See **BUILDINGS**, 14



Photo by Grant McLaughlin/Dispatch Staff

The Flexsteel site is shown at 212 Industrial Park Road. The Flexsteel building is just one site out of three vacant buildings in Starkville targeted for development potential. The Golden Triangle Development LINK and the city are currently marketing two Flexsteel buildings as well as the speculative building inside the Northstar industrial park.

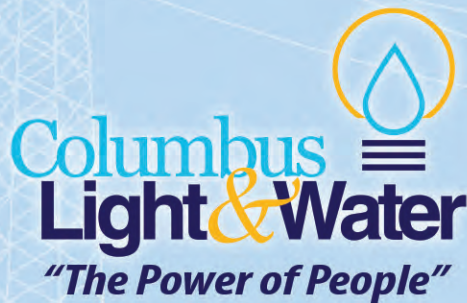


Photo by Grant McLaughlin/Dispatch Staff

The CURiO building shown at 1010 Lynn Lane. CURiO is just one of three vacant buildings in Starkville targeted for development potential. The Golden Triangle LINK and the city are currently marketing the two Flexsteel buildings as well as the speculative building inside the NorthStar industrial park.

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Land: Lowndes County's best problem

LINK looks for additional acreage, works with TVA for megasite Cinco

BY GRANT MCLAUGHLIN
grant@cdispatch.com

Last fall, Lowndes County was sitting on the largely vacant Infinity Megasite, 2,100 acres of shovel-ready industrial development land west of Golden Triangle Regional Airport. But with the announcement of Aluminum Dynamics' acquisition of that entire site, the county now finds itself with very little land to market.

Since 2006, Lowndes County has been home to three Tennessee Valley Authority certified Megasites, which collectively represent more than 4,200 acres. A fourth Megasite in Clay County includes more than 500 acres.

Marketing large swaths of land with established infrastructure has long been the strategy of the Golden Triangle LINK, the organization tasked with industrial recruitment for the area. The strategy has been successful. In addition to ADI and Yokohama, the other Golden Triangle Megasites house Paccar and Steel Dynamics.

"It's a good problem to have," Lowndes County Board of Supervisors President Trip Hairston said of Lowndes County's sudden shortage of land. "You're going to see vast amounts of construction going on in that megasite over the next three years. It sounds odd that we don't have any more land. However, it does create a challenge. We just don't want to sit back and rest on our hands and say 'Look at what we've done.' You got to be prepared for the next generation of recruitment that we're going to see here."

Hairston told The Dispatch he and LINK CEO Joe Max Higgins are planning out an idea to add



The future Aluminum Dynamics Inc. at the Infinity Megasite is shown in this aerial photograph. This Megasite is one of three in Lowndes County. Now, the Golden Triangle Development LINK and Lowndes County Board of Supervisors are working to find and work toward the next one, Cinco.

a new megasite shortly after ADI announced a \$2.2 billion investment to build an aluminum flat-rolled mill off Charleigh D. Ford Jr. Drive and a biocarbon manufacturing facility off Artesia Road in November. The project, named Cinco, will represent the Golden Triangle's fifth TVA certified Megasite in the area.

A megasite is a large swath of land, usually more than 1,000

acres, dedicated to industrial developments for several companies to build and operate on. The megasite program is managed by the Tennessee Valley Authority, and nearly one third of all certified Megasites are located in the Golden Triangle, according to information on the LINK's website.

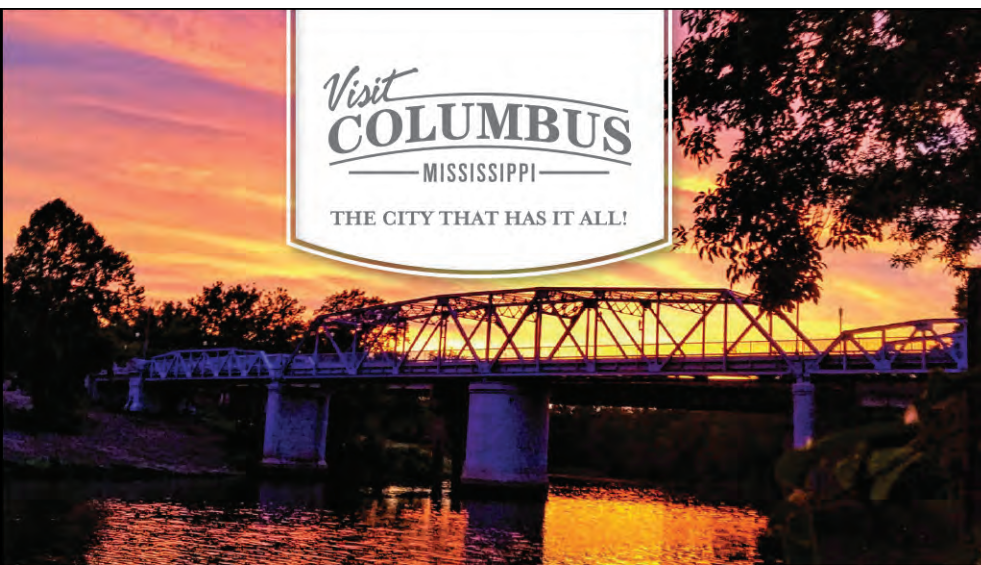
Hairston added that to be classified as a TVA megasite, those lands will also need to have close

access to utilities and interstate highways such as Highway 82 and Highway 45, which run through portions of Lowndes County.

To prepare for future recruitment, Higgins and his team at the LINK have been busy surveying potential areas to build the next megasite. While Higgins declined to disclose a specific location for Cinco, he said the LINK is speak-

See *LAND*, 14

Photo courtesy of The LINK



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4-County 'vital' to industrial recruitment in Golden Triangle

Electric cooperative plays key role in recruiting, servicing industry

BY GRANT MCLAUGHLIN
grant@cdispatch.com

When the Yokohama Tire Plant was built in West Point in 2015, executives from the company's home country, Japan, flew in to the site via helicopter to visit the newly finished plant.

But when they wanted to land next to the plant, power lines blocked their way.

What did then 4-County Electric Power Association CEO Joe Burt Cade do? He lowered a set of power lines, allowing the helicopter to land.

"(Cade) said 'Well, they're our power lines and I can take them down if I need' That's just what he did," current CEO Brian Clark said. "The biggest takeaway from that standpoint is we don't go in the shallow end of the pool, we go in the deep end in terms of doing what needs to be done to help our area grow."

Clark told The Dispatch the power association, which has a presence in nine counties, has always tried to lend a hand to assist industrial recruitment and development in the Golden Triangle.

Over the years, 4-County has assisted in connecting power to several large companies throughout the area, with notable examples such as Steel Dynamics, Paccar, Airbus and Yokohama.

To do that, the electric cooperative has built electrical substations, which connected those businesses to the Tennessee Valley Authority grid. Each substation cost the power association between \$4 million



Courtesy of 4-County Jon Turner

A 4-County Electric Power Association electrician repairs a powerline. 4-County has been heavily involved in industrial recruitment in the Golden Triangle by connecting major companies such as SDI, Paccar and Yokohama to the TVA grid. Golden Triangle Development LINK CEO Joe Max Higgins said the power association has been vital not only to recruit, but also lend a hand to the LINK when needed.

and \$6 million.

"We had to put a lot of that work up front to make sure that these businesses have power," Clark said. "It takes time for us to recoup that cost. Because we're a not-for-profit, we don't have to have a fast return on investment like for-profit entities."

Golden Triangle Development LINK CEO Joe Max Higgins said the power association has been critical in more ways than just providing power to industries, though. Higgins said 4-County has lent a big hand with industrial recruit-

ment by providing its connection service, but it also gives the LINK the keys to the company van.

"They actually bought a van that we probably use more than they do," Higgins said. "They bought it for when they had to take men to work on storms or they had conferences that they had several people going to, and the link probably uses that van more to show people around."

Higgins added that 4-County has also improved the area as a whole by installing broadband lines throughout its nine-county

territory, which also looks good for industry recruitment.

"They go over and above and beyond what most utility companies do," he said. "For the last 20 years, they've done more, exceeded and signed up for more than anybody ever signed up for and they do it very well. They don't half-ass anything."

Higgins added that he has such confidence in 4-County, he "firmly believes" it would send workers in if the LINK was ever short-staffed.

"That's just the type of relationship we've got," he said.

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Land

Continued from Page 10

ing with TVA representatives to determine how the process will work.

“What we’re shooting for is about a 1,500-acre megasite,” Higgins said. “Get all the due diligence done on it and then start marketing it and every day we come to work and we’re making headway towards getting that done. I think we’re going to have something pretty soon that we can share with the public.”

Once the next site is acquired, Higgins said plans to install water and sewer infrastructure will be critical, as well as road upgrades, environmental surveys and working with TVA to set up power connections. He also said that work is important to make sure several industries have the option to locate there, which increases the vitality of the new site.

“They’re going to need space,” he said. “It could be automotive parts like stamping plants for cars, it could be a bigger food processor, it could be an aerospace company. I mean, there’s a whole lot of different things that can go there.”



Photo by Grant McLaughlin/Dispatch Staff

Steel Dynamics’ Columbus mill is pictured from Airport Road in Lowndes County. SDI sits on one of three Megasites in Lowndes County, and now the Golden Triangle Development LINK and Lowndes County Board of Supervisors are working together to prepare for the next megasite project: Cinco. Before the project can come to life, LINK CEO Joe Max Higgins said they need to find the land and work with Tennessee Valley Authority to locate and prepare for that site.

Columbia Industries

Continued from Page 5

pumps to dump trash. In the 90s, it added oil and gas drilling equipment, such as heavy-duty cranes, to its list of products.

In July 2022, Moss decided to move to Starkville and announced a \$9.5 million investment into the former metal building manufacturing plant. The company began operating the plant in January.

Moss also said their Starkville location is perfect for two reasons other than space: access to interstate highways and available workforce.

“When we ship our equipment to our customers, which are predominantly in the eastern part of the United States, it would cost us \$50,000 just to ship it (from Oregon),” Moss

“When we ship our equipment to our customers, which are predominantly in the eastern part of the United States, it would cost us \$50,000 just to ship it (from Oregon). Now with fuel prices and inflation. It’s \$60,000-\$70,000 just to ship the equipment. So we started looking for a place in the southeast that had two things.”

Tom Moss, Columbia Industries President

said. “Now with fuel prices and inflation. It’s \$60,000-\$70,000 just to ship the equipment. So we started looking for a place in the southeast that had two things.”

Now, Moss said the company is currently operating its Starkville facilities at a small capacity by only manufacturing certain tippers, vehicle compac-

tors and other solid waste products. Plant Manager Jason Riel said the plant will be boosting operations into the oil and gas industry products as it establishes local market customers and moves headquarters into the company’s new home.

“We are going to improve operations over the next three years,” Riel said.

Buildings

Continued from Page 7

pensive space, it’ll be cheaper than building a new space. But you’re probably not going to see a silicon valley high-tech company want to go into that building.”

As far as working with the LINK to market those buildings for the city, Mayor Lynn Spruill said it would continue to rely on the LINK for future investment at those sites.

“We rely on the LINK to make those contacts, they are our industry specialists,” Spruill said.

“When they bring us a project, we respond to them as the project dictates. We think that the LINK team and Joe Max have done excellent work for us.”



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