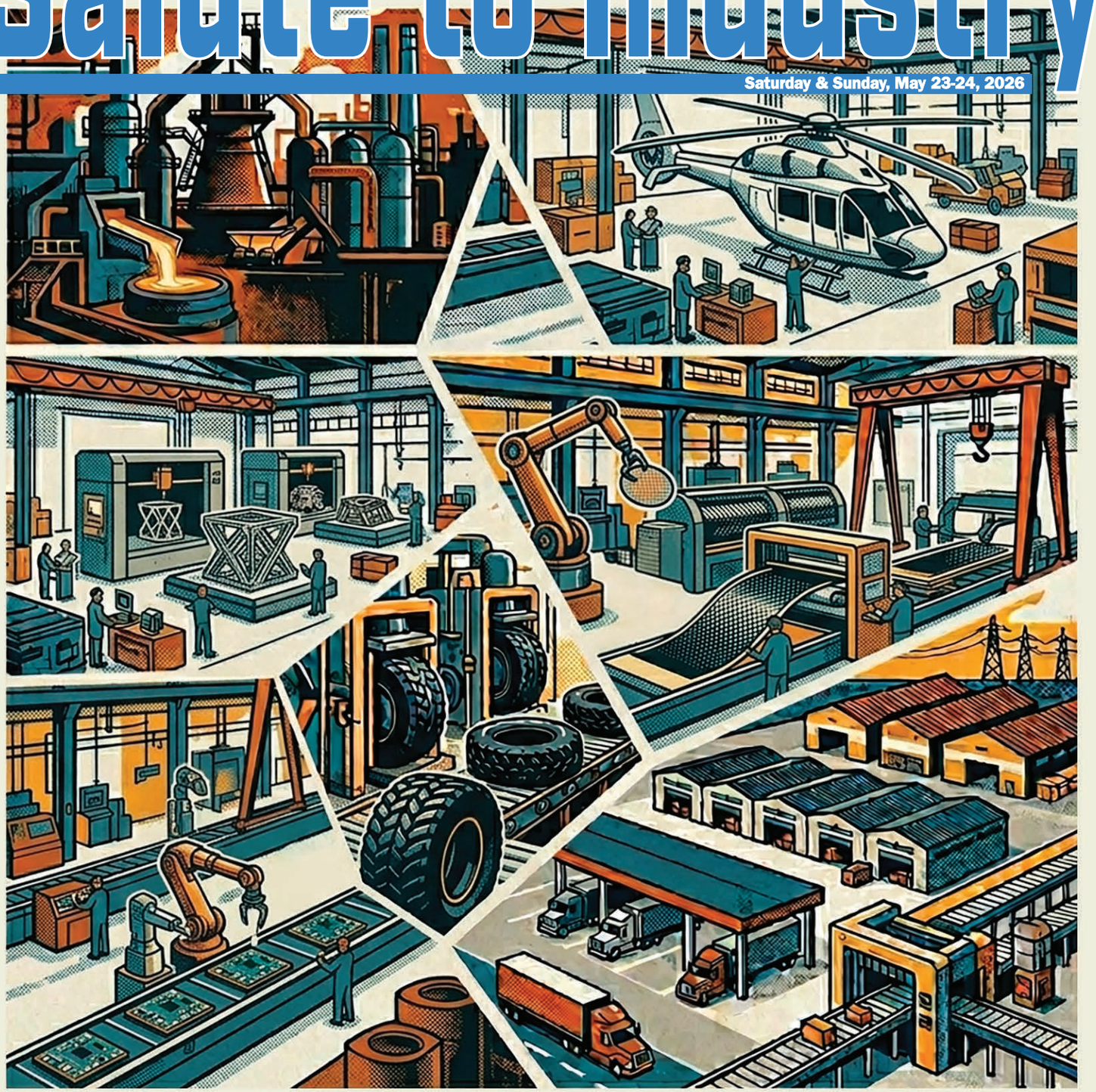
Salute to Industry

Saturday & Sunday, May 23-24, 2026



THE DISPATCH

New fire station shapes better outcomes for emergencies at industrial park

Personnel responding to average of 10 calls per month since opening

By Braden Simmons
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Every minute matters when an accident happens at the industrial park west of Columbus.

It takes about 20 minutes before an ambulance arrives on scene to take an injured worker to Baptist Memorial Hospital-Golden Triangle.

But since Oct. 1, it now only takes about six minutes before firefighters and paramedics with Industrial Fire and Rescue are on the scene at any of the 30 industry sites in its response area, including Steel Dynamics Inc., PACCAR Engine Company and New Process Steel.

"We can do a lot in that time frame while patients are entangled, trapped (or) whatever the case may be … to get a positive outcome on the other side," said Neal Austin, Industrial Fire and Rescue station manager.

Those efforts have already paid dividends, Austin said, including saving the lives of two workers critically injured during a November flash fire at SDI's Biocarbon Solutions plant.

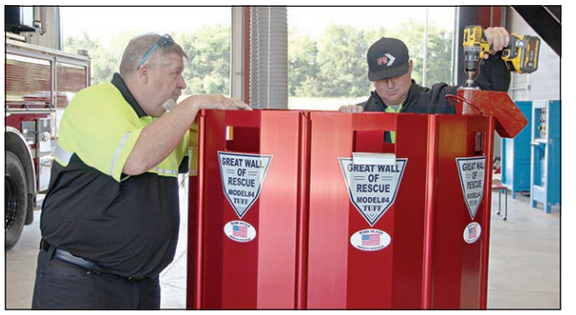
With the gamut of emergencies at the industrial park and the isolated nature of the area, Austin said it was important for the station to be advanced life support certified. That means the paramedics at the station can provide assistance and use supplies beyond just CPR and oxygen, which is what most city and county departments use.

Those supplies include prescription painkillers, intravenous fluids and splints for broken bones. Soon, Austin said the station will be equipped for blood transfusions to help keep a patient stable until an ambulance and other paramedics can arrive on scene.

Rickey Rials, a firefighter and paramedic with the station, said those supplies have helped him save several lives already out at the industrial park.

"We've made several calls where it's benefited people that we were already on scene, taking care of them by the time the ambulance got here," Rials said. "… (The station has a) low call volume, which is good, but when we get stuff, it's usually pretty significant stuff. … So it's good to have ALS capabilities right there fast, so you can help them."

Austin said the station's call volume any given day ranges from none to four but since opening the station has responded to roughly 80 emergency calls.



Braden Simmons/Dispatch Staff

Neal Austin, left, Industrial Fire and Rescue station manager, watches Monday while firefighter Josh Westbrook drills an opening in a grain bin. The station opened Oct. 1 to expedite emergency response times at more than 30 industry sites at the industrial park on the west side of Lowndes County, Austin said.

On slower days, a five-person crew on shift may go out and perform a walkthrough on-site with the safety staff of industry partners.

"They'll take us through their facility and show us where their hazards are, where their safety guards are, (and) how to get in the facility," Austin said. "... One thing that I want to make sure that we have got down is when the address comes in, or the name comes in, our guys know exactly where to go."

With the help of his pool of roughly 31 part-time firefighters from the Golden Triangle and surrounding areas, Austin said the station has done about 10 of those walk-throughs so far. He hopes to eventually meet with all 30 industry partners.

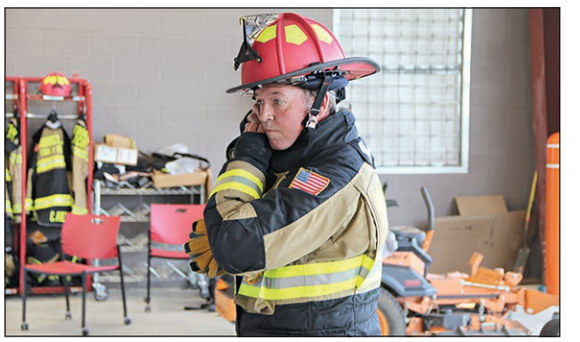
Josh Westbrook, a firefighter at the station, said those walk-throughs have helped firefighters feel prepared and confident when entering those areas during a response.

"We get to really learn and see what they deal with and their high hazards, and we're able to adapt to those (and) figure out how to mitigate those issues if they have them," Westbrook said. "(We do) a lot of hands-on (work) with industry out here, which is probably the perk to being here. So you really specialize in what is needed for each scenario."

The station was initially funded by a $10 million contribution from SDI. But after the passage of Senate Bill 4134 in April that created a new tax district at the park, a portion of the property taxes generated by the 30 participating industries will support the station.

Braden Simmons/Dispatch Staff

Firefighter James Hayes, left, leads a water hose out from a fire truck Monday while firefighter Darren Albritton carries the line out the front of the station. The station was initially funded by a $10 million contribution from Steel Dynamics Inc., now up and running and with a new tax district approved with the passage of Senate Bill 4134 in April, the station can now rely on tax revenue for new equipment and training area, station manager Neal Austin said.



Braden Simmons/Dispatch Staff

Rickey Rials, a firefighter and paramedic with the Industrial Fire and Rescue station, straps on his helmet Monday at the station in Lowndes County. The station is advanced life support certified, which means the station carries supplies like prescription painkillers, intravenous bags, splints for broken bones, and soon blood transfusions to help keep a patient stable for up to an hour while an ambulance drives to a response.

Austin said through that new funding source, he plans to seek additional investments, like a new on-site training facility for firefighters and other industrial site safety personnel to practice emergency responses.

"It'll have live burn capabilities, it'll have man versus machine rescue capabilities (and) confined space (training)," Austin said. "So we can talk about it, but we can also bring the guys in from different plants and let them actually (practice) rescuing and once we build those relationships, our response pool gets bigger and bigger and bigger. And so it helps us (and) it helps the community."

What's next after CINCO?

Region leaders already eyeing land for future industrial development after the region's fifth Megasite is filled

By Emma McRae
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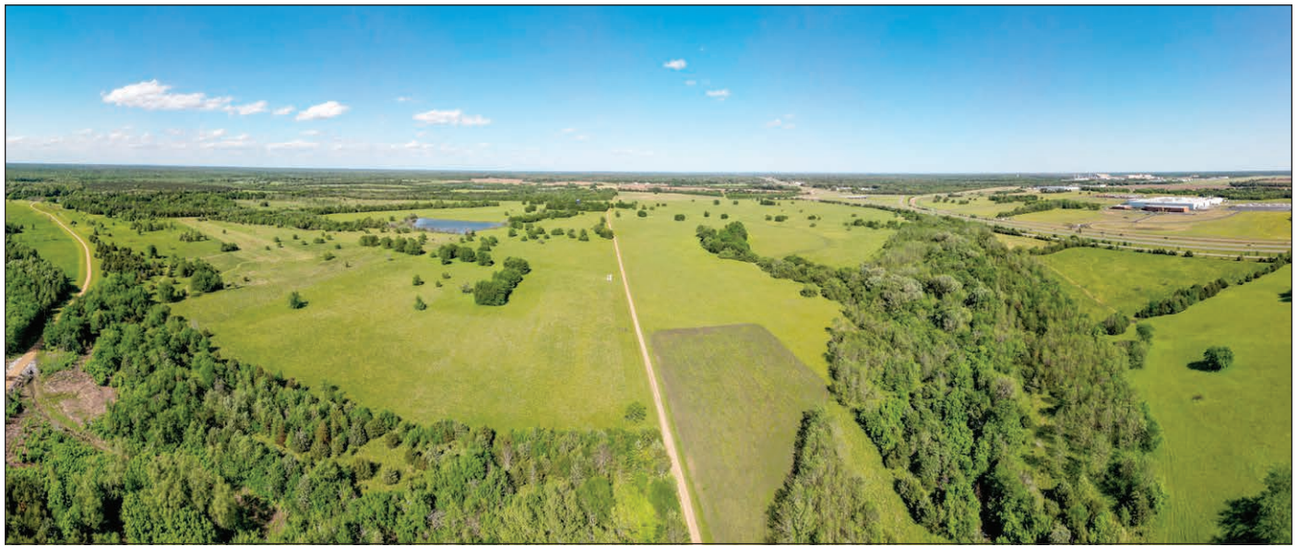

Courtesy of Golden Triangle Development LINK

CINCO, the fifth certified Megasite in the Golden Triangle, is pictured. While the Golden Triangle Development LINK has yet to land the first industrial tenant for the Megasite, leaders are already considering what sites around the region can be developed for future use.

In the more than two decades since its founding, the Golden Triangle Development LINK has helped clear thousands of acres of land for industrial development, bringing millions in industry to the region, creating nearly five Megasites and thousands of jobs.

While CINCO, the region's fifth Megasite, has yet to see its first tenant, the question of what comes next is already being asked – and answered.

"I won't say that (CINCO) is the last Megasite ever," said LINK CEO Meryl Fisackerly. "I would say our responsibility is that we first need to fill the CINCO Megasite and get tenants there, but we do need to be forward thinking, and we do need to be thinking about what is our next large land development."

Trip Hairston, president for the Lowndes County Board of Supervisors, agreed with Fisackerly. Industry and businesses go through cycles, Hairston said, pointing to examples like the former Ceco Building Systems in Columbus, which closed in 2006.

"It was a big driver of economics because you had high-paying jobs, you had a lot of engineers under one roof, and then … they were trucking all that stuff," he said. "In my lifetime, I never would have believed that you could look through where Ceco Building Systems (was on Highway 45) and can see right through that site all the way to Bluecutt Road."

For that reason, Hairston said it's imperative that the region keeps thinking about the next site.

"I don't think you can ever really take your foot off the gas to say, 'Hey, you're good,'" he said. "... We may not, with the next site, … be able to recruit a 5000-job industry, not immediately anyway because the market sets that demand. But I still think you have to be marketable."

As for the next Lowndes County site that could be developed and marketed for industry, Hairston points north.

"North of Columbus, on (Highway) 45 … going towards the Monroe County line up that way, you've got rail," he said. "You've got a lot of things that you look for in industrial development. I'm not saying that's where we go next, but there are opportunities (in other places) than just the surrounding adjacent properties to (Golden Triangle Regional Airport)."

Fisackerly said the region also has prospects in Oktibbeha and Clay counties, including unfilled space at the Northstar Industrial Park.

"Something out here is in Oktibbeha County (is on our radar), being on the west side of Oktibbeha County," she said. "... And the same with Clay County as well. We still have a lot of available land there, and the area that we've been developing there still has a lot of potential just given the infrastructure that's been built there. We've got a lot of different things on our radar looking toward the future."

Two options for the future, already acquired and prime for development, are the former Mississippi Sheriffs Boys and Girls Ranch property in Lowndes County and about 109 acres GTRA owns between the southern end of the airport runway and Airport Road.

Lowndes County supervisors in February deeded a portion of the former Mississippi Sheriffs Boys and Girls Ranch property to Lowndes County Industrial Development Authority, the rest of which was already owned by LCIDA. That 320-acre tract, Fisackerly said, was "low-hanging fruit" for building out the region's portfolio.

"We know that it's going to fit in our portfolio from size, location, but we still probably need to do some due diligence on that site," she said. "And then the overarching goal would be to have it one day house some type of industrial tenant like we see all our other industrial properties doing."

The airport purchased the 109 acres last year for $2 million, with all of the airport's stakeholders pitching in to cover part of the cost. Fisackerly said the LINK and GTRA will work together to market the land to the best tenant, likely one from the aerospace industry.

"We get projects all the time that are looking for direct-runway access or they might need a hanger, so the right tenant for that property would be an aerospace tenant," she said.

But raw acreage, Fisackerly said, is only a starting point. Logistical aspects, like proximity to major transportation routes and whether utilities can service the area, have to be considered when looking at developing land as well as proper due diligence, like environmental and cultural impact reports.

"There's a whole entire development process that we go through," she said. "There's a lot of boxes that we want to make sure we're checking, and we're going through the process of making sure it's a good fit for the community, making sure the resources are there for it and the utilities would be available or able to get there."

After 180 years, Columbus Marble Works remains at top of its field

By Cadence Harvey
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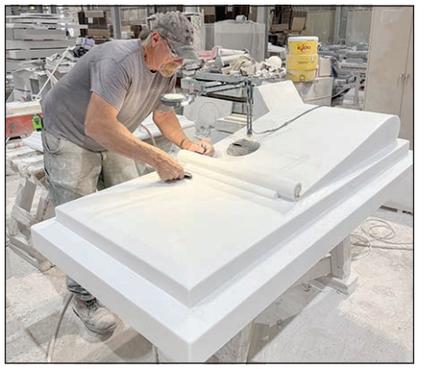
At the turn of the 20th century, a young Thomas Arthur McGahey earned 50 cents a day smoothing the surfaces of marble headstones at Columbus Marble Works, a modest operation tucked near the railroad tracks in south Columbus.

More than a century later, his great-great-grandson, Sanders Edmondson, answers calls from grieving families, helps couples plan their own headstones and walks customers through rows of polished monuments inside the showroom at the company's now 130,000 square-foot production facility on Highway 45. Outside, more than 50 employees – many of them McGahey descendants – work among the whir of saws and clouds of stone dust to keep the 19th century business alive.

"It's kind of one of those businesses that … you'll always need," Sanders said. "I think that's why we've never gone away. There was always somebody that needed a headstone or needed something from Marble Works. That's kept us going. … There's no plan to get out of (the business) anytime soon."

Founded in 1846 by two Scottish brothers, Columbus Marble Works originally produced tombstones, mantles and urns before being purchased by John Stinson in 1891. Less than a decade later, McGahey joined the company as a teenager and eventually took ownership. Since then, the business has moved locations, yet remained in the family through generations of Joneses, Gholsons and Edmondsons.

Today, the company is one of only two remaining industries in the Golden Triangle dating back to the 1800s, and according to Sanders, is the oldest continuously operating business in Mississippi.



Courtesy/Columbus Marble Works

Leon Smith prepares a slab of marble for sandblasting, a mechanized form of engraving designs or words into the stone, at the 130,000-square-foot Columbus Marble Works plant on Highway 45. The business has adapted over the 180 years it has been in operation, embracing computerized technology and the use of artificial intelligence.

Although the company can produce nearly anything made of marble or granite, headstones remain its primary product, Sanders said. The plant produces roughly 10,000 civilian monuments annually, along with between 150 and 200 markers each day for Veterans Affairs cemeteries nationwide.

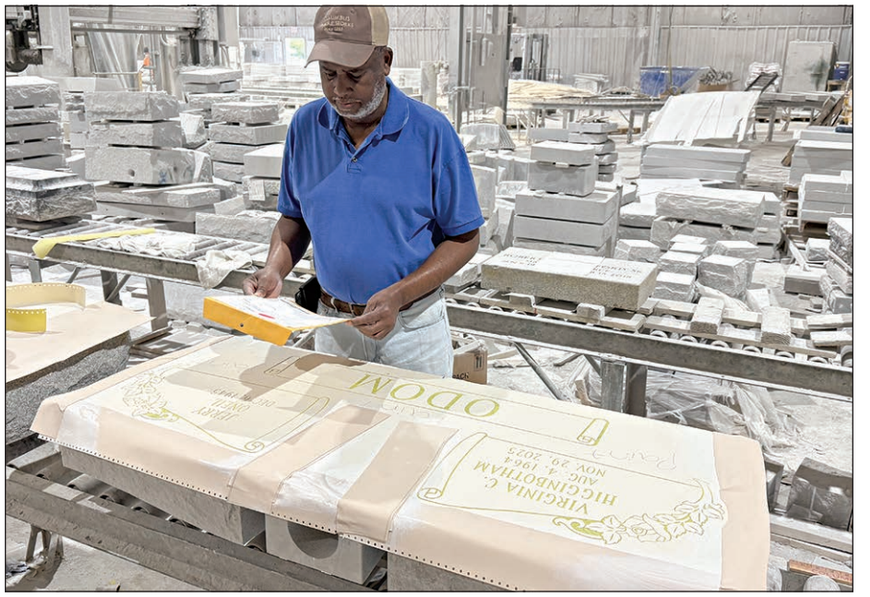
Adapting to change

Plant Manager Colby Upton, who has worked at the company for about a decade, said technology has transformed the trade.

"Many new machines and saws … have made working with stone a lot less complicated," he said.

Where artisans once spent days carving marble by hand with chisels and hammers, workers now use computerized profiling saws and sandblasting machines that dramatically speed production.

"They can cut a lot faster than what we used to do by hand," Sanders said. "It was a … slower process. … But now … you can basically put in the cut you want into a computer, sit (the marble) on a block and the saw will do the rest."



Courtesy/Columbus Marble Works

Shead Trimuel reviews design plans for the engraving of a double headstone in the Columbus Marble Works facility. Computerized profiler saws and sandblasting machines have drastically increased efficiency and production at the plant compared to its beginnings in 1846, when artisans spent days carving marble by hand with chisels and hammers.

The company has also embraced newer technology in its design process, Sanders said. The rise of artificial intelligence now allows families to create more personalized monuments than ever before.

"Our customer base on the civilian side really wants to put their own touch on things instead of using pre-made designs," he said. "With AI … people are able to have the tools at their disposal to create something that they want, and they can send it to us and then we can recreate it for them. … In the past, I would say we weren't able to give customers exactly what they wanted, … so now with AI, we're able to give customers exactly what they're looking for, which is great."

Workers upload designs into computer programs that guide the saws before artisans create stencils and etch the finished images into stone using sandblasting equipment.

While many businesses eventually lose their footing to competitors, Sanders said competition never posed a major threat to the company, which remains one of the nation's largest monument manufacturers.

"There are definitely other monument companies," he said. "But … a lot of them are just selling

See ***MARBLE WORKS****, 11*

Deanna Robinson/Dispatch Staff

Rows of polished headstones are pictured in a showroom at Columbus Marble Works on Highway 45. The business, which began in 1846, is one of only two remaining industries in the Golden Triangle dating back to the 1800s.

Marble Works

Continued from Page 10

(headstones) ... but they're ordering their headstones from a bigger company, like us. … There are some other businesses developing, but I don't think they have …the scale we have."

The company's greatest challenge came during the Great Depression – the only time it has come close to closing its doors.

"People were not spending money on headstones," Sanders said, recalling details shared by his grandfather. "They were trying to just keep food on the table at that time, so it was a luxury to get someone a headstone or buy them a monument, things like that at that time. … They fell on hard times."

Still, McGahey persisted, and the company endured. The reason for that, Upton said, is thanks to the company's concern for craftsmanship and community.

"We owe our longevity and success to consistently delivering quality work and building strong relationships within our community," he said. "We focus on treating every customer with care and respect, which has earned us trust over generations.

"... It does help having several employees who have committed over 40 years to CMW and the knowledge they have consumed and passed down over that time," he added.

Today, Columbus Marble Works headstones fill the rows of the city's oldest and newest cemeteries and sprawl across the country, with pieces of carved marble making their way to portions of the Washington Monument and veteran markers at Arlington National Cemetery.

"It really fills you with a sense of pride to continue a family business like ours," Sanders said. "... Our family is very close, and none of us really move too far. It's always been something we've all been very excited about. … We do everything to keep it going."

Bitcoin mining operation eyes expansion in Columbus

Facility helps balance electrical grid demand by drawing power during off-park hours

By Emma McRae
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For nearly a year, a bitcoin mining facility in Columbus has quietly operated thousands of computers around the clock, drawing on excess electricity capacity from Columbus Light and Water with hopes of expanding soon.

Owned by LM Funding America Inc. since September, the facility houses more than 2,000 specialized computers used to mine the digital cryptocurrency.

"We run thousands of these computers," said Todd Liebel, vice president of LM Funding's U.S. Digital Mining and Hosting Co. subsidiary. "They don't have screens on them. They don't look like your standard computer. They're basically just boxes with fans on them, and most of the day is just keeping these computers online and working."

Bitcoin is a mostly unregulated currency that is separate from a government-backed currency, like the dollar. Bitcoins are held in digital wallets to be used for transactions, which are publicly and permanently recorded using what is called a blockchain.

The 2,300 computers operating at the Columbus facility, Liebel said, are responsible for securing that blockchain.

"They're basically guessing numbers, they're solving equations, and then it helps add security to the blockchain," he said. "It's what moves Bitcoins on the blockchain, so if you send Bitcoin from one person to another, this is basically what allows that move to take place. It keeps the whole thing functioning. In return, we are given a reward of Bitcoin for doing it."

The facility has four on-site technicians who are responsible for monitoring the computers and making repairs when needed, whether that's fixing a motherboard, changing a fan or working on transformers and other electrical infrastructure.

That infrastructure, Liebel said, was a big draw for locating at the Columbus site.

"What Columbus had already was … a lot of power on the grid ready to go," Liebel said. "We don't come in and try to get someone to build out more power to existing power. … CLW said, 'Hey, we have this off-peak power, and if you want it, we'll give it to you.' It allowed us to tie into the grid. They didn't have to build out any additional infrastructure.

"... The whole name of the game for us is, we try to find cheap power, and the only way power is cheap is if, essentially, there's excess power when people aren't using it," he added.

Courtesy of Todd Liebel

From left, Kyle Miller, Charlie Morgan, Levorn Williams and Justin Hill, technicians at a Bitcoin mining facility in Columbus owned by LM Funding America Inc., stand atop one of the buildings at the site. The 2,300 specialized computers mining the cryptocurrency draw roughly 7.5 megawatts of electricity, though the company hopes to eventually expand to a full capacity of 11 megawatts.

Liebel said the facility shuts down each day during peak hours for electricity usage. So for example, between 1 and 7 p.m. in the summertime when electricity usage is higher, the computers power down to avoid drawing too much power from the grid.

That remote access means the facility can also be powered down during emergencies when the grid may need more power, like during Winter Storm Fern in January.

"We're not curing cancer or anything over here," Liebel said. "... So if there are any problems or anything like that, we're happy to turn off (and) give the grid the power. You're not anybody's friend if … houses are running out of power, and you're still running your Bitcoin mine.

"... Utilities like CLW, they really get a kick out of it because they've got someone pulling load when no one else will," he added. "But when the load starts getting a little hot, … we turn off."

Liebel said the facility's electricity demand is about 7.5 megawatts. However, infrastructure already in place at the facility allows for about 11 megawatts, an expansion Liebel said the company is hoping to start by the end of this year.

"(CLW) has some additional electrical capacity, and it would just be (adding) a few more of these modular (computers) – they almost look like shipping containers – to the site," he said.

Angela Verdell, general manager for CLW, said the utilities' relationship with the facility perfectly demonstrates how industrial customers can work with utilities to support both economic development and grid reliability.

"The ability for the facility to reduce or pause power usage during periods of peak demand helps CLW better manage system load and maintain reliable service for all customers," she said. "Programs like this can be especially beneficial during extreme weather events or other times of heightened energy demand."

Verdell confirmed discussions around future expansion are in progress.

"Additional flexible load resources can provide economic benefits to the community while also supporting efficient grid operations when paired with strong coordination and demand-response capabilities," she said.

Industries around the region

STARKVILLE

Southwire
103 Airport Road
Produces and distributes electrical wire and cable products

Amazon Last Mile
115 Jack Wallace Blvd.
Facilitates local Amazon deliveries

Garan Manufacturing
100 Jack Wallace Blvd.
Specializes in making patterns and samples for its children's clothing company, Garanimals

Clark Beverage Group
110 Miley Drive
Distributes beverages including soft drinks, beer and flavored water

Andritz Metals
401 Mississippi 12 W.
Supplies clients with complete production and processing lines for steel and aluminum

Columbia Industries
101 Airport Road
Manufactures complex structures, bridges and fabricated metal parts for solid waste, recycling, oil and aerospace industries

COLUMBUS

Steel Dynamics Inc.
1945 Airport Road
Produces and distributes flat-rolled steel

Airbus
1782 Airport Road
Assembles utility helicopters

Altex Tube
1923 Airport Road
Manufactures and distributes mechanical steel tubing

Stark Aerospace
319 Charleigh D. Ford Jr. Drive
Manufactures and provides missile canisters and other defense products to armed forces

Terberg Taylor Americas
1131 Charleigh D. Ford Jr. Drive
Manufactures terminal tractors used to move semi-truck trailers to and from loading docks

Aluminum Dynamics
3414 Charleigh D. Ford Jr. Drive
Produces and ships flat-rolled aluminum sheets and coils

SDI Biocarbon Facility
661 Manufacturers Drive
Produces biocarbon products from breaking down organic waste to fuel SDI's steel mill

New Process Steel
280 Industrial Park Road
Processes, manufactures and distributes flat-rolled steel

Quality Beverage
82 Yorkville Park Square
Produces and distributes beverage concentrates, syrups and liquid sweeteners

Valmet
617 Yorkville Park Square
Performs service repairs for board, paper, tissue and pulp producers

Paccar Engine Company
1000 Paccar Drive
Manufactures diesel engines for Kenworth and Peterbilt trucks

Global Cellulose Fiber
4335 Carson Road
Produces and distributes paper and pulp products

Columbus Marble Works
2415 Hwy. 45 N.
Produces marble monuments and head stones

Columbus Brick
114 Brickyard Road
Manufactures and distributes more than 40 types of brick

ABB Motion
70 Industrial Park Access Road
Manufactures and distributes Baldor-Reliance air conditioning motors

Aurora Flight Sciences
200 Aurora Way
Assembles framework for defense and commercial aircrafts

Burford Electric Service
154 Cooper Road
Performs electromechanical repairs on electric motors and pumps for industry clients

East Systems
41 Fabritek Drive
Produces and installs specialized electric control equipment for the printing, mining, packaging and converting industries

Nouryon Chemicals
4374 Nashville Ferry Road E.
Produces sodium charlotte and hydrogen peroxide for use in the paper industry

Mississippi Steel Processing
400 North Steel Road
Specializes in toll processing, storage and logistics for SDI

Glenn Machine Works
734 US-45
Specializes in steel fabrication, crane and rigging services and millwright services for industry clients

Systems Contracting Corp.
3413 Charleigh D. Ford Jr. Drive
Performs maintenance and engineering services for steel industry clients

Trimjoist Corporation
5146 Hwy. 182 E.
Manufactures wood floor systems and platforms

Sqwincher
1409 US-45
Manufactures and distributes electrolyte beverages

WEST POINT

Yokohama Tire
1 Yokohama Blvd.
Manufactures and distributes tires

Peco Foods
1379 W. Church Hill Road
Distributes poultry products to stores and restaurants

Southern Ionics
579 Commerce St.
Manufactures and distributes aluminum, sulfur, ammonia, and zirconium chemical products

Navistar Defense
901 E. Half Mile St.
Assembly plant for manufacturing and upgrading tactical and armored defense vehicles

Fabricators Supply
205 Airport Road
Performs metal fabrication techniques on metal tubes, sheets and plates for clients nationwide

Owl's Head Alloys
535 E. Industrial Access Road
Melts and recycles aluminum products and by-products to supply Aluminum Dynamics

Plum Creek Environmental
1302 E. Industrial Access Road
Manufactures waste containers and compaction equipment

This list, provided in-part by Golden Triangle Development LINK, is not a comprehensive overview of all industries in the region.

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