

LIBERTY 
COUNTY **DEVELOPMENT**
AUTHORITY



AS FEATURED IN *BUSINESS IN FOCUS*
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GLOBAL BUSINESS PROPELS • LOCAL GROWTH •

The Liberty County Development Authority (LCDA) in Coastal Georgia has worked diligently to recruit manufacturers and distributors to its community for more than 30 years, citing proximity to the Port of Savannah and the presence of the Fort Stewart labor pool as advantageous characteristics. It appears the efforts are paying off, as industrial sector employment has grown 461 percent since 1981, with 70 percent of industrial employment tied to companies that are headquartered overseas.



Written by Leon Bracey

Located about 30 miles south of Savannah, Georgia, and 105 miles north of Jacksonville, Florida, Liberty County offers industrial sites with great logistics access. Tradeport East Business Center is less than one mile from Interstate 95, one of the busiest interstate highways in the country, and in close proximity to Interstate 16, giving the county quick access to Atlanta and the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. Distribution companies in Liberty County are able to serve several markets – including all of Florida – within one day's travel time. Additionally, Liberty County's access to the ports of Savannah, Brunswick, Jacksonville and Charleston also offers a logistical advantage for businesses interested in opening distribution centers or manufacturing facilities in the area.

"We continue to have good growth in manufacturing and distribution in our county."

The LCDA was chartered in 1958 for the purpose of enhancing the economic growth and development of Liberty County. The LCDA is governed by a seven-member Board of Directors comprised of seats for the chairman of the Liberty County Board of Commissioners and the mayor of Hinesville, the seat of government for the county. These two seats ensure political represen- ➤



Ronald Tolley, CEO of the LCDA, is a 43-year veteran of the economic development field, with experience in areas such as business research bureau studies; vocational and technical institute instruction in economic theory and management/labor relations; regional economic planning and development with a nine-county, bi-state agency; and concentrated county-wide development. Tolley and Danielle Besser, Director of Marketing & Communications for the LCDA, spoke with Business in Focus about Liberty County and what attracts businesses to the area.

“Liberty County’s industrial employment has grown 461 percent over the last 30 years.”

“We have class-A business parks 30 minutes from the Port of Savannah and sufficient infrastructure for businesses,” Tolley says. “Our community is also enhanced by the presence of Fort Stewart and its associated workforce, which includes more than 300 soldiers transitioning out of service each month. Ensuring that executives and site selectors are aware of these assets and the associated success stories is the core of our marketing and outreach program.”

Even during a period wherein the nation lost manufacturing jobs, Liberty County’s industrial employment has grown 461

► tation that is well informed about current projects, and foster timely processing of development projects and permits. Four additional positions are appointed by the Liberty County Board of Commissioners and one additional position is appointed by the Hinesville City Council.

Over the years, the LCDA has worked to develop industrial parks, constructed shell buildings, and supported Savannah Technical College’s campus and workforce development programs including the Liberty College & Career Academy. The LCDA has participated in other partnerships to provide community assets such as an Army education center to serve both Fort Stewart and civilians, and to establish a joint-use airport that serves the military and general aviation.



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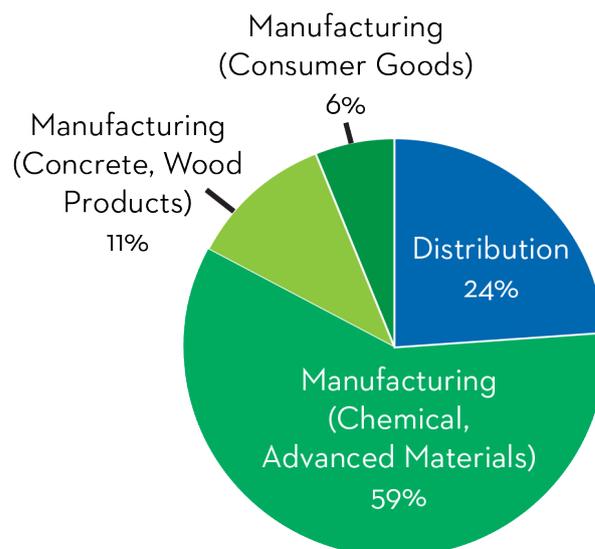
percent over the last 30 years. Much of the county's industrial growth is related to foreign-direct investment, with 70 percent of industry employment tied to companies headquartered overseas. Liberty County's largest industrial employer is French-owned SNF Holding Company, which specializes in water-soluble polyacrylamides used in the drinking water production, wastewater treatment, mining, paper, enhanced oil recovery, agriculture, textile, and cosmetics sectors. SNF opened a plant in the town of Riceboro in 1986 with 35 employees and now has more than 1,500 total employees and a satellite subsidiary in the process of expanding.

"A recent highlight of the LCDA's association with area manufacturers is the establishment of the Liberty County Manufacturing Collaboration in 2013."

UK-based gift-wrap manufacturer International Greetings has its American manufacturing facilities in Liberty County as well. The company initially came to Liberty County in 1996 in a 50,000 square foot shell building at Midway Industrial Park with 65 employees. The company expanded the footprint of its facility several times, and has since grown to more than 500,000 square feet over three buildings within the park and a team of 180 employees.

Among Liberty's newer industries is Alcoa Forgings and Extrusions, an aerospace manufacturer that came to Tradeport East Business Center in 2011 as Firth Rixson Forgings, a UK-headquartered company. Shortly after locating in Liberty County, the company announced an expansion that added 20 percent to the building's size and increased employment projections to

Liberty County Industrial Employment



Source: 2014 industry employment count

300. In November 2014, Firth Rixson Forgings was acquired by Alcoa, an American company with more than 59,000 employees in 30 countries.

Additionally, the LCDA has sought special designations from the state that reduce the cost of doing business, and has engaged in a number of tax abatement programs, with savings opportunities that apply to land, building, inventory, machinery and equipment. "We established Foreign Trade Zones through the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and an Opportunity Zone with the state of Georgia," Tolley explains. "Two of our sites are designated as Georgia Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) sites, which means the sites have been through the permitting processes and are ready for business."

LCDA has established industrial parks, such as the 4,500-acre Tradeport Business Center. Currently home to four tenants, ►►



Our mission is to provide the highest quality of life, nurture a strong business community, and maintain efficient governance for the residents of Hinesville.

Thank you LCDA for being part of the team!



- ▶ Tradeport East is the first phase in the industrial park, which was planned for a 40-year build out. The park offers Class-A business space less than one mile from Interstate 95, with GRAD designation, high elevations, and sandy soils for quick and easy building. Tenants include distribution centers for Tire Rack, Target, and Pactra/Hankook in addition to Alcoa Forgings and Extrusions.

The Authority has also secured an Opportunity Zone designation for the park, which provides for a \$3,500 per-job tax credit each year for a five-year period. In addition, LCDA has worked with resources such as the Georgia Public Service Commission to secure STRIDE (Strategic Infrastructure Development and Enhancement Program) funding for a \$9.7 million high-pressure gas line expansion to serve both the Midway Industrial Park and Tradeport Business Center.



LCDA actively markets the park to site selection consultants and Georgia project managers. In addition, the team participates in trade shows and industry conferences to connect with prospective industries. "We participate in marketing activities such as attending conferences in the economic development field, including the Industrial Asset Management Council," says Tolley. "We also send out quarterly emails to project managers in the state and site selectors to keep them aware of activities in Liberty County."

"The LCDA has engaged in a number of tax abatement programs to attract business to the area."

With the nearby Port of Savannah, the fourth-most active container port in the nation, the LCDA has also built partnerships with Greater Savannah's economic development authorities. "We have active engagement with the World Trade Center in Savannah," Tolley says. "We partner with them, hosting various foreign delegations and officials as they visit the Savannah area."

Fort Stewart, the Army's largest installation east of the Mississippi River, is located in Liberty County. The base houses more than 21,000 soldiers and 10,000 spouses and an estimated 300 soldiers transition out of military service each month. Known as "Heroes for Hire," these soldiers have the skills and technical savvy that are desirable for industrial employees. The proximity of the base also has another benefit. "Military children help expose people to the additional cultural opportunities that they wouldn't have in a civilian area," explains Tolley. "Military children have traveled all over the world. They add a lot to conversations in area classrooms and have formed friendships with local people. It's a good and culturally broadening experience for kids to have."

A recent highlight of the LCDA's association with area manufacturers is the establishment of the Liberty County Manufacturing Collaboration in 2013. The collaboration consists of manufacturers Alcoa Forgings and Extrusions, Elan Technology, Interstate Resources, and SNF Holding Co. These manufacturers enjoy a partnership with Savannah Technical College and the Liberty College and Career Academy. Together, the organizations have launched a paid apprenticeship program that places participants in on-the-job training while they complete coursework toward an Associate of Applied Science degree with a specialization in Manufacturing Technology.

Liberty County has continued to defy the odds on the heels of the fluctuations of the manufacturing industry and its quiet



location just south of Savannah means that it has easy access to a major port yet residents can still enjoy a very high standard of living. Tolley feels that this will enable the county to grow and attract businesses for years to come, while remaining an attractive place to live and raise a family.

"We are pleased about the growth of manufacturing and distribution centers in our county and anticipate continuing the pace," shares Tolley. "We encourage any company that is looking to grow internationally to come grow globally in Liberty County alongside thriving foreign-direct investment and the American-owned companies that export to more than 80 countries worldwide." ■



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