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Gallatin Honored by Expansion Solutions as Top 5 Automotive Destination

Economic Development Agency Receives 2008 Award of Excellence

The City of Gallatin received international recognition in the November/December issue of Expansion Solutions magazine, making the list of Top 5 communities by receiving a 2008 Award of Excellence in Automotive Manufacturing. These awards recognize organizations that have demonstrated exceptional progress and potential in economic development by successfully recruiting, retaining and growing businesses.

The magazine cited Gallatin's rich automotive-related manufacturing community that includes ABC Fuel Systems, ABC Technologies, Hoeganaes Corporation, ITW-CIP, Loyalty Mobile Innovations, PK Tennessee, and Salga Plastics as evidence of a strong work force and logistically advantageous location for this industry sector that has become arguably the most predominant manufacturing sector in the southeast over the past few decades.

"This recognition validates our emphasis on an existing industry expansion and retention program and our not abandoning manufacturing efforts," Gallatin Economic Development Agency Executive Director Clay Walker said. "We have put a great deal of effort and had our share of success in front office operations and the retail sector. Still, being in the southeast we would be foolish not to seek opportunities in the automotive manufacturing sector. We certainly value the existing companies we have in that sector and their success can only lead to more success, even at a time when the industry as a whole is struggling."

Expansion Solutions said that the recent announcement that Superior Inspections would relocate from California to Gallatin in late October was also a last-minute factor. Superior Inspections relocated to be closer to its largest customer, ITW-CIP, following that company's expansion of its Gallatin plant which has led to more hires and an expanded product line. The magazine used that success story as an example of the importance of the EDA's GEAR (Gallatin Expansion and Retention) program as the agency has worked with ITW-CIP through two recent expansions.

"Just one example of the strength of this city is exemplified by ITW-CIP," the magazine explained. "While their corporate office could be expanding any of their 100-plus plants located around the world, ITW-CIP continues to invest in Gallatin."

With the national news being dominated by the downturn in the economy and the impact it is having on the automotive industry, officials say that while active projects may be fewer than usual, it is important not to lose sight that this industry has had a tremendous impact to the southeast and will continue to be an important sector.

"The Nashville region's unique talent pool, prime logistical assets, and a culturally rich quality of life make our region particularly attractive to the automotive industry," says Janet Miller, Chief Economic Development and Marketing Officer for the Nashville Area Chamber

of Commerce. “Our regional economic development team is experienced in this industry and is committed to working with companies relocating to our region.”

TVA Senior Vice President of Economic Development John Bradley agrees. His agency spends much of its recruitment resources focusing on automotive projects, including having a presence at the larger automotive trade shows. TVA also provides communities with help in marketing and product development.

“We congratulate the City of Gallatin EDA team for being named as one of Expansion Solution’s 2008 Top Five Automotive Award of Excellence organizations,” he said. “When a community identifies and focuses on their key strengths – highly skilled workforce, training opportunities, business-friendly practices, transportation access – it makes them better prepared to locate new companies and to help existing ones grow.”

Walker said that he believes the Gallatin EDA’s utilization of strong regional groups, like the Nashville Chamber, TVA, and MTIDA, coupled with the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development’s strong reputation within the site selection consultant and automotive worlds have helped Gallatin stand out from most similar sized communities.

He also said that Bradley’s characterization of the “EDA team” is especially appropriate when the organization receives this type of recognition. “It’s not just the EDA staff and our Board of Directors. It’s the Mayor and City Council, Volunteer State Community College, our technical schools and the school system as whole. It’s the behind-the-scenes people who represent us in Nashville and Washington who fight for our road projects and other money that improves our community and region. Without this product, we wouldn’t have much to market and support.”

While the EDA will use the award in promotional materials, officials do not believe that it will have a measurable impact on recruiting. Still, independent, third-party recognition is something the City and EDA should tout as evidence of an increasingly business friendly community.

“Anytime a national and even international site selection magazine says that your community is among the top five for anything you have to be excited,” said EDA Chairman Tim Galvin. “It gives credibility to everything the City and the EDA do and, hopefully, inspires us all to do more. Things like developing the new industrial park property, creating a PILOT program, establishing GEAR, continue to send the message that the EDA markets, which is ‘Gallatin gets it.’ We, along with the thousands of other economic development organizations across the country, strive to differentiate ourselves from the pack. I’d say a Top 5 Award of Excellence selection proves that we are doing that.”

The other Automotive Award of Excellence recipients were: Danville, Virginia; Oshawa, Ontario, Canada; Ferriday, Louisiana; and Brandon, Mississippi. The magazine also noted Middle Tennessee’s reputation for successfully recruiting corporate headquarters.