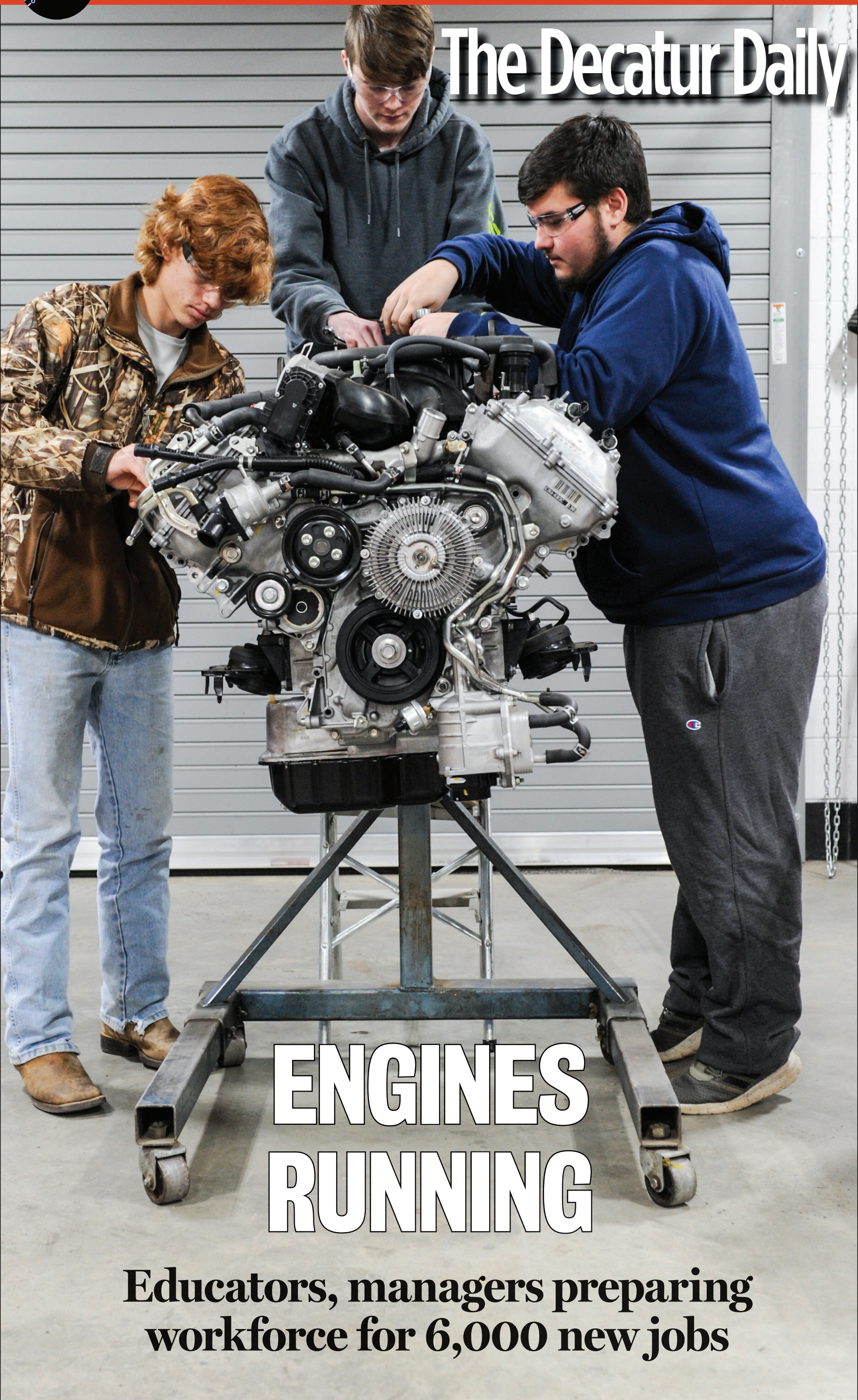


The Decatur Daily



ENGINES RUNNING

**Educators, managers preparing
workforce for 6,000 new jobs**

INSIDE: Programs in local school systems
prepare students for auto industry jobs

WEDNESDAY: Keys to quality lifestyles — What
the Decatur area has to offer newcomers as
well as longtime residents





Decatur resident named production lines Apollo, Discovery

Fulks will oversee startup and operations of vehicle assembly

By Marian Accardi
Staff Writer

As the general manager-assembling for Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA, Lance Fulks will have responsibility for the startup and operations of vehicle assembly for the plant's two production lines. And he has the distinction of naming those lines, taking a cue from Huntsville's role in the nation's space program.

Fulks, 43, who has had a 20-year career in manufacturing, joined Mazda Toyota in April 2019 as one of its first five employees.

"The impact this (facility) is going to have both economically and on individuals is huge," said Fulks, a Decatur native and resident of the city. "I'm very excited to be a part of it."

The plant is scheduled to start operations next year.

"This is going to directly impact 4,000 people, and impact them positively," Fulks said. "They're going to learn new skills, they're going to be exposed to new technologies."

"They will develop as individuals and also will be provided competitive pay and benefits."

The project is also expected to have a ripple effect in creating indirect jobs in the community.

"The impact of the presence of Mazda Toyota for Huntsville and north Alabama is tremendous," Fulks said. "Being a Decatur resident, I already see that there's going to be that impact for Decatur as well."



Lance Fulks, a Decatur native and resident, is one of the first five employees hired by Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA. He is general manager-assembly. [COURTESY PHOTO]

Fulks said he and Janette Hostettler, Mazda Toyota's vice president of production, brainstormed ideas for production line names that would motivate employees and not give the appearance of one outranking the other.

He kept thinking about the significance of the space program for Huntsville.

"Huntsville is so well known for their place in space exploration," he said. "That's a huge part of the history of Huntsville. How could we reflect that and hopefully drive some pride with our workforce?"

"So we chose to name them after space programs: Apollo for one of our production lines and Discovery for the other," Fulks said. "I wasn't sure what the response would be, but there's

been a lot of favorable reaction."

Fulks is a graduate of the University of Alabama in Huntsville, with a degree in industrial and systems engineering. He previously worked with Navistar Inc., where his jobs included plant manager and director of manufacturing. He was part of the team that launched Navistar's Huntsville facility and worked for a couple of years at Navistar headquarters in Chicago, but had relocated back to the area.

Toni Eberhart, the company's corporate communications specialist, said the largest number of production employees will work on the assembly side, so about 2,000 employees will fall under Fulks' scope of responsibility.

After he was hired, Fulks went through new employee

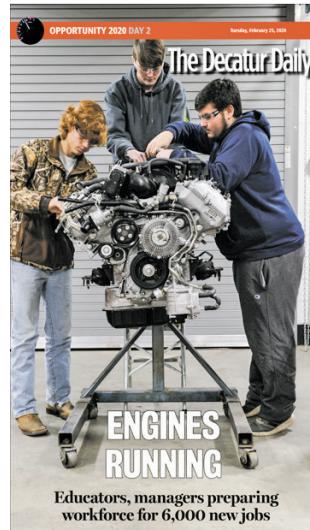
orientation and had the opportunity to visit Toyota facilities in North America as well as a Mazda facility in Mexico.

Since April, he's also spent about six weeks at Mazda and Toyota facilities in Japan.

"Having worked in manufacturing for 20 years, you always hear about the Japanese culture and the impact that's had on lean manufacturing and productivity," he said. So it was a treat for Fulks "to be able to go there and see it firsthand, to see it applied in their facilities."

"When you've dedicated your career to manufacturing, that's a unique opportunity," Fulks said.

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About this section

With Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA expected to hire 4,000 employees by 2022 and its local suppliers having announced plans to fill 1,700 jobs, north Alabama's workforce will be revitalized.

Today's Opportunity section looks at how Mazda Toyota will hire employees, what the new jobs mean for the local labor force and plans to train students for the auto industry.

On the cover: Brewer High School's Auto Technology students Casey Lamons, left, Lane Garrett and Bryson Holmes work on an engine supplied by the Toyota engine plant in Huntsville.

Cover photo by Jeronimo Nisa and design by Leah Daniels/THE DECATUR DAILY

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Amanda G. Scott

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Mailing Address

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Decatur, AL 35602

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Second Floor
Decatur, AL 35601

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The auto service technology class at Lawrence County High Career Technical Center in Moulton has tire diagnostic testing equipment. [DECATUR DAILY FILE]

Tight job market presents challenge to fill automotive jobs

By Michael Wetzel
Staff Writer

The 5,700 announced jobs arriving with Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA and its suppliers will be filled by newcomers, recent graduates of high school and college programs, and other current residents, local officials said.

“The workforce is going to come from both our existing residents looking for better job opportunities and from people moving to our region for those new jobs,” said Jeremy Nails, president and CEO of the Morgan County Economic Development Association. “There are many areas throughout the U.S. that do not have the same quality job openings that we will experience in the next three years.”

City of Decatur Development Director Wally Terry said the demand for labor will motivate communities and businesses to offer training.

“Finding the labor should remind us to appreciate our loyal employee base and to do all possible to retain that knowledge base,” he said. “The homebuilders today are struggling to find labor and have started their own schools for training at the state and local levels. The commercial trades have also started funding trade training through commercial building permits managed by the Alabama Building Commission.”

Morgan County

“Anything regarding the career tech center is preparing our kids to go directly out into the workforce. We want to build our career tech center so our kids have the best chance to get employed with a company like Mazda Toyota.”

— Michael Douglas, Decatur City Schools superintendent

Commission Chairman Ray Long says it’s inevitable that local communities will have an influx of new residents for the area’s expanding job market. In addition to auto industry jobs, the FBI is moving 1,400 positions to Redstone Arsenal.

“Presently the unemployment rate is around 2% for most of north Alabama,” Long said. “Just about anyone who wants a job has a job. What we will see is a lot of the present job-holders shifting around to higher paying jobs. Then the back-filling of those jobs will take place.”

“With the expectation of 10,000 to 12,000 new jobs for north Alabama in the next few years, there will have to be recruitment from other areas. Without new people coming into our area, we would really be pushed to fill all the jobs that are coming.”

Limestone County Commission Chairman Collin Daly said his county’s workforce is preparing for the influx of jobs.

“Limestone County is fortunate to be experiencing such growth and great opportunities for our future,” he said. “We

have such a strong workforce in our region that has already earned global recognition. The workforce needed will come from our local workforce and will also come from individuals moving in to the area to take advantage of these great opportunities.”

Career tech programs

Decatur School Superintendent Michael Douglas said the career tech sites at both city high schools have about 800 students for the 20 to 25 programs.

“Anything regarding the career tech center is preparing our kids to go directly out into the workforce,” he said. “We want to build our career tech center so our kids have the best chance to get employed with a company like Mazda Toyota.”

Lawrence County Superintendent Jon Bret Smith said the school system is expanding its career tech programs to help the new industrial businesses fill their openings. Smith said presently the Lawrence

County Career Tech Center has 385 students enrolled, who will be trained and ready to step into the workforce once they graduate. Lawrence County has 10 career tech programs presently, and Smith said he hopes to double the number of programs and students enrolled in a few years.

“Currently, we believe our measure of success is graduates who are prepared for after graduation,” Smith said. “We want our graduates to be successful in the college and/or the workplace. The (Lawrence County Career Tech Center’s) current efforts are focused on ensuring all students are successful in a program that will prepare them for college and the workplace. We have programs for nurses, engineers, pharmacists, welders, industrial maintenance workers, auto technicians, auto industry workers and aerospace personnel.”

Smith said efforts are being made to have the students ready for Mazda-Toyota jobs.

“Last year, we received a \$415,000-plus grant, which led us to adding an advanced manufacturing program,” he said. “The Mazda-Toyota plant couldn’t have come at a better time for us. At this time, many are focused on



Smith



Douglas

career tech. We rely on our industry partners to ensure graduates have the skills to succeed in the workplace.”

He said to work in production at Mazda-Toyota, employees will need to have a certified production technician certification.

“We offer this certification program to our students,” he said. “Moreover, our industrial maintenance program helps students prepare for the Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education or FAME program.”

The FAME program joins students with industrial businesses while they take classes at specific community colleges, including Calhoun Community College.

Douglas and Smith were encouraged to hear Mazda Toyota Manufacturing is interested in their industrial maintenance programs.

“Industrial maintenance

is a big area of focus for us even though we don’t have a facility yet,” said Lyndsay Ferguson, assistant manager of human resources for Mazda Toyota. “We are actually part of the FAME. We have 12 students going through that. They are actually working on unique projects and will be part of bringing the equipment into the facility and get it up and running. We are already looking to build a pipeline for that workforce. We recognize the needs that we have for industrial maintenance and any students interested in that area. It is a critical need for us in the foreseeable future.”

She said industrial maintenance technicians would be applying for a maintenance position, not production positions.

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Just The Facts

Mazda Toyota and suppliers: 5,700 jobs

The investments and job creations planned for Limestone County plants:

- Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA, 2,500-acre site in Huntsville-annexed Limestone County, \$1.6 billion, 4,000 jobs
- Toyota Boshoku America, Breeding North Industrial Park in Athens, \$55.9 million, 400 jobs
- DaikyoNishikawa US (DNUS), Mazda Toyota site, \$110 million, 380 jobs
- Y-tec Keylex Toyotetsu Alabama (YKTA), Mazda Toyota site, \$220 million, 650 jobs
- Vuteq USA, near Mazda Toyota plant, \$60 million, 200 jobs
- Sanoh America, inside Mazda Toyota plant, \$2.9 million, 42 jobs
- CCI Manufacturing USA Corp (Mallard Fox West Industrial Park in Trinity), \$21.5 million, 28 jobs

Mazda Toyota application process begins online

By Michael Wetzel
Staff Writer

The application process is relatively simple and initially done online for the 4,000 jobs that will be needed by 2022 when full staffing has been reached at the Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA plant being built in Limestone County.

Lyndsay Ferguson, assistant manager of human resources for staffing and development at Mazda Toyota, said production jobs will begin at \$17 an hour.

“Team members are eligible for wage progression

increases each six months from the start rate of \$17 to the top rate of \$23 over a six-year period,” she said.

She said the initial screening of applicants is accomplished online.

“At the beginning stages, everything goes through an automation process,” Ferguson said. “Are you willing to work rotating shifts, willing and able to work overtime, willing to consent to a drug screening and background



Ferguson

check?”

Ferguson, who was hired in August, said once the basic questions are completed, candidates will take an assessment that lasts about 1½ to 2 hours.

“If they successfully pass the assessment, they will immediately be picked for a day of work assessment,” she said. “(The candidate will schedule) and they come to the assessment center. ... After that, they will be given a timeline.”

After completion of the application process, company officials said, it may take three months or more before an offer is extended.

Ferguson said Mazda Toyota eventually will have two production shifts — 7 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 3:45 a.m. — Monday through Friday. Employees will work rotating shifts every four weeks.

She said the hours allow both shifts to spend time with their families and school-age children. The company will have two production lines, one for a planned Mazda SUV and one for a new-to-market Toyota SUV.

The company is hoping for a large number of applicants because only

a small percentage will eventually make it through the process to become an employee.

Toni Eberhart of corporate communications with Mazda Toyota said the company “anticipates the need to receive between 40,000 and 50,000 total applications over the two-year mass hiring process in order to satisfy our need for 3,000 production team members to support the plant.”

“This is due to the 7% pass rate through our application and assessment process,” she continued.

Local residents interested in applying with the company should visit mazdatoyota.com and click on production job opportunities.

Mazda Toyota had about 300 employees in mid-January but has been busy hiring since.

Ferguson said about 1,000 construction workers are at the site daily as they build the 3.7 million-square-foot facility in the Greenbrier area of Limestone County.

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Leaders: Labor pool could be drained from demand

By Michael Wetzel
Staff Writer

Morgan County Economic Development Association President and CEO Jeremy Nails and other county leaders worry the local labor pool will be hard-pressed to fill the jobs brought in by Mazda Toyota Manufacturing locating in nearby Limestone County.



Nails

The automaker and its suppliers have announced they'll need 5,700 workers at full production, and other suppliers are expected to locate in the area.

"If the economy continues to grow, and unemployment remains at historic lows, there will be some strains on our local labor pool," Nails said. "We are working closely with our local school K-12, community college systems to help fill and maintain that workforce pipeline. There are also a large number of underemployed individuals working a less-skilled job than they are qualified for that could land a better job."

He said the new companies will open plenty of doors. "There is a lot of opportunity for individuals to find a new exciting career opportunity in our



The press building is taking shape at the new Mazda Toyota plant in Limestone County as the company begins ramping up hiring for jobs inside it. Officials hope to go from roughly 300 employees early this year to almost 2,000 by the end of 2020. The plant will have close to 4,000 workers by 2022 as it gets ready for a full production schedule. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

region," he said.

Ray Long, Morgan County Commission chairman, said the salaries offered at Mazda Toyota and its suppliers could lure top workers away from good-paying jobs with companies they have been at for years.



Long

"We'll definitely see a ripple effect of people leaving for those jobs across the river and companies here having to offer their good employers more money to stay or bring in new workers," he said. "(The county) may have to look at changing our pay scale or risk

losing our best workers. It will be something to look at come next budget time."

Wally Terry, Decatur development director, said the demand for workers will put a stress on several industries outside of the automotive positions to be filled.

"It will further stress the hospitality industry and certain engineering sectors for the region to meet the demand," Terry said. "It is my opinion that it will afford the local citizen an opportunity to move up within the opportunities being created as well as the need to attract the skilled labor force that may not currently exist. I believe the students looking for jobs and internships that

are currently in college should benefit greatly as well as others who may desire part-time employment."

He said the area must work together to meet the additional demands.

"I do not believe I have experienced in my lifetime the potential for real growth in our community that exists over the next several years due to the variety of jobs that are being created," Terry said. "It is critical that we work together at all levels to put forward the image that people would choose to live, work and play in our community."

Limestone County Commission Chairman Collin Daly said the local

workforce and communities will embrace Mazda Toyota locating here. "They and the individuals relocating to our area will benefit from the workforce demand that Mazda Toyota and its suppliers will need."

Company officials said on any given day about 2,500 construction workers at the site working.

Lawrence County School Superintendent Jon Bret Smith said the continued low jobless rate is a good sign for recent graduates.

"With record low unemployment, many new workers will come from the school system or those who are not currently employed," he said. "This demand will help ensure

our graduates will have a great job and that they can be successful."

Mazda Toyota officials said they are expecting to receive between 40,000 and 50,000 job applicants to get the necessary 4,000 or so positions needed by 2022.

"This is due to the 7% pass rate through our application and assessment process," Toni Eberhart of Mazda Toyota corporate communications said in an email. "The grand majority of our applications to date have come from within the 75-mile radius surrounding our plant location where we concentrate our recruiting efforts. However, we have received one applicant from the Bahamas and another from India."

Hiring for the majority of the planned jobs, including 600 jobs for skilled labor and professional staff, will be complete sometime in 2022. The plant hopes to have 3,186 production team members by 2022, according to data provided by Lyndsay Ferguson, assistant manager of human resources for Mazda Toyota. That includes 791 involved in vehicle body specialties, 411 in paint, 1,622 in assembly and 362 in quality.

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Pryor Field waiting to serve new plant's cargo, travel needs

By Bayne Hughes
Staff Writer

New Manager Adam Foutz hopes his Pryor Field Regional Airport's location is just what Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA's officials want.



Foutz

development authorities to sell Pryor Field as the place to import cargo "quickly and

cheaply" without the hassle that large airport may offer.

"We're only just over 10 miles away," Foutz said. "And we've got the capacity with our 6,000-foot runway."

Located off U.S. 31, Pryor has become the location for many of the local companies to use for bringing in and flying out their top executives for meetings, inspections and corporate activities.

Roughly 150 aircraft, including four jets, use the field that's a partnership of the cities of Decatur and Athens, as well as Limestone

and Morgan counties.

"We hope Mazda Toyota will want to use us, too," Foutz said.

The airport's plans focus on maintaining its infrastructure, including redoing the taxiway and runway. Both will cost about \$500,000, which Foutz said will likely come from FAA grants.

Pryor only has about 50 leasable hangars. With 150 aircraft regularly using the field, Foutz would like to add more hangars in the future.

Pryor Field opened in October 1941 with a

4,600-by-4,600 foot square all-direction turf runway. The U.S. Army Air Corps trained flying cadets under contract to Southern Airways Inc. and Southern Aviation Training School Inc.

The airport was later assigned to Gulf Coast Training Center (later Central Flying Training Command) as a primary (level 1) pilot training airfield.

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The passengers of an executive plane, including University of Alabama men's basketball head coach Nate Oats, left, walk toward the terminal at Pryor Field last year. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

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The new Mazda Toyota plant under construction in Limestone County will manufacture separate, new model SUVs for Mazda and Toyota. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

Mazda, Toyota reveal only that plant will make SUVs

By Bayne Hughes
Staff Writer

The SUVs that Mazda and Toyota will manufacture in their joint Limestone County assembly plant remain a secret, but there is industry speculation about where the vehicles could fit in the companies' product lineup.

"We're set to assemble up to 300,000 vehicles annually — 150,000 of those vehicles will be Toyota new-to-market SUV vehicles, and 150,000 of those will be Mazda new-to-market SUV vehicles," said Lyndsay Ferguson, assistant manager of HR staffing and development with Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA.

The two SUVs will share components and suppliers to improve efficiencies. But, unlike Toyota and Mazda's arrangement with the Yaris, in which Mazda builds a rebranded version of its Mazda2 subcompact for Toyota, these SUVs will be different vehicles.

Mazda asserts they will be "developed independently by each brand."

Both vehicles will debut sometime in the 2022 model year, with production slated to start in 2021.

"We hoping to create some consistency with all of the vehicles so we can build a safe and reliable vehicle," Mazda Toyota spokeswoman Toni Eberhart said.

Toyota already produces several SUV models, including the Sequoia, Highlander, RAV-4, Land Cruiser and 4Runner. Toyota originally had said it would produce the compact Corolla at the new plant but announced in July it would produce an SUV instead. This shift is in response to changing market demands and a growing consumer appetite for light trucks and SUVs like the RAV-4.

"The demand for the sedan is going down while the SUV is trending upward," Eberhart said.

Car & Driver reports that it believes Toyota will make a version of the FT-4X concept from 2017 that will slot in between the compact RAV4 and the subcompact C-HR.

"This boxy small crossover would give Toyota a more rugged-looking,

off-road-oriented entry in the small-SUV segment in the vein of the Jeep Renegade. The existing C-HR is more carlike and does not offer all-wheel drive," the magazine says.

The initial vehicles produced in the new plant will be gas fueled, but Eberhart said one of the pillars of the company is to develop an affordable electric vehicle.

"Hopefully, one day we'll produce an electric vehicle that everyone wants and can afford," Eberhart said.

Because Mazda currently has a gap in its lineup between the compact CX-5 and three-row CX-9 crossovers, Car & Driver said its "best guess" is that the new model built in Alabama will be a mid-size two-row crossover to compete with vehicles like the Honda Passport and Chevrolet Blazer.

Mazda could revive the CX-7 name from a previous crossover that was discontinued in 2013, since the company maintains a trademark in the U.S. for that moniker.

"Mazda executives have previously said that this model will be developed

specially for the U.S. market and claimed that it could become the company's top-selling model here," the magazine says.

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The 2020 Highlander is among SUVs that Toyota already produces. [TOYOTA PHOTO]



LaTrenda Malone, who lives in the Clements area of Limestone County, is a training specialist at the Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama plant in Huntsville. [TOYOTA MOTOR MANUFACTURING ALABAMA PHOTO]

Engine plant employee: 'It's really like a family'

Limestone resident Malone has been with Toyota since 2002

By Marian Accardi
Staff Writer

HUNTSVILLE — LaTrenda Malone was among the first 50 employees at the Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama engine plant when she came on board in 2002, before the facility even started production.

At the time, Malone, 42, who lives in the Clements area in Limestone County, and other new hires used a few engines that were available to practice their skills. Today, the plant has about 1,400 employees, all full time, said Kim Ogle, corporate communications analyst with Toyota Motor North America. Last year, production reached nearly 610,000 engines — a mix of 4-cylinder, V6 and V8 engines. Malone has worked

in production as a team leader and group leader, and moved to HR about eight years as a training specialist. She trains team leaders and group leaders and conducts orientation for new hires.

"One of the great things about Toyota is it doesn't limit you," she said. "They give you lots of opportunities to do different things here."

She's also the "secretariat" of the Quality Circle, an initiative in which groups of three to 10 employees get together to discuss any process-related issues and are encouraged to use an eight-step problem-solving method to come up with a solution. Malone coaches the groups through the QC process.

Previously, Malone worked at office furniture manufacturer Steelcase in Athens until she was laid off there, then took a temporary job at Federal-Mogul. She responded to an ad about Toyota jobs and, for two weeks, she

worked an eight-hour shift at Federal-Mogul, then took training classes at night. She was offered a job as a team leader.

The HR position is perfect for Malone, who described herself as a "people person."

"It's really like a family" at Toyota Alabama, she said. "I look forward to seeing my coworkers every day."

Three other women who started in production at the same time as Malone still work side-by-side.

"We've been together for 17 years," Malone said. "We were all in production together, and now we're all in HR together. They're like my sisters now."

Malone has an hour-long drive to and from work.

"If I didn't love my job, I wouldn't drive over here every day," she said.

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TOYOTA ENGINE PLANT

Huntsville facility continues expansion

By Marian Accardi
Staff Writer

In an industrial park on the far north side of Huntsville, a sprawling complex houses the Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama engine plant, which started producing V8 engines for the U.S.-made Tundra pickup truck in April 2003. That marked the first time those engines would be built outside Japan.

By that summer, Toyota Alabama announced it would expand to produce V6 engines and create more jobs, and it has continued to expand and increase its workforce. The facility is on track to build its 7 millionth engine in April.

And city leaders said its presence here has had an impact that extends beyond job creation.

"Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama has been an exemplary community partner," said Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle. "They provide quality job opportunities with benefits and training and they generously support our local civic organizations with time and resources."

Battle said Toyota employees routinely volunteer, whether it's planting trees, cleaning up trails, painting houses and buildings.

"In turn, Huntsville has been able to provide Toyota with a steady stream of skilled workers to meet their demand and support expansions," he said.

Toyota Alabama has announced its fifth expansion, and after two production lines are added, the plant will be able to produce 900,000 engines annually, said Kim Ogle, corporate communications analyst with Toyota Motor North America.

The new 4-cylinder and V6 engine lines will add 450 new jobs, the largest hiring need in the plant's history, and bring the total investment at the plant to \$1.2 billion and employment to 1,800.

"Toyota Alabama is currently hiring for production-related positions and skilled maintenance as



The Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama plant off Pulaski Pike in Huntsville has continued to expand since starting production in 2003. It is expected to build its 7 millionth engine in April. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

Toyota engine plant production

The 2019 production breakdown represents engines built for six of the 10 vehicles produced by Toyota in North America.

42% percent (254,516) are V6 engines built for Tacoma and Highlander.

36% (221,595) are 4-cylinder engines for the RAV4, Highlander and Corolla.

22% (133,218) are V8 engines for the Tundra and Sequoia.

part of the plant's expansion," Ogle said.



Cherry

Chip Cherry, president and CEO of the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce, who has been involved in Toyota Alabama expansions since joining the chamber in December 2011, said, "We hold them up as the gold standard for community engagement."

When companies come to town and want to build a reputation as a preferred place to work, "I say, you may want to look at what

Toyota has done," Cherry said.

According to Toyota Alabama, it has donated, as of last month, \$11 million to local nonprofits in north Alabama. In 2019 alone, it supported more than 40 local nonprofit organizations, investing more than \$700,000 in areas of education, mobility programs, environmental initiatives, human services and diversity.

"The Toyota folks are very community-minded, community-focused," Cherry said. "When you look around, they've been very involved in different philanthropic organizations in town."

"I think that just goes back to their philosophy of wanting to be part of the fabric of the community," he said.

Cherry noted Toyota Alabama's efforts to reach out in education and workforce development. One example: last year, it donated two Corollas and 12 engines, originally used to provide onsite training for employees, to support the advanced manufacturing program at Drake State Community & Technical College in Huntsville.

The \$46 million stadium being built in Town Madison, which will be the home of the minor league baseball team Rocket City Trash Pandas, was named Toyota Field last year, after a partnership agreement was reached between team ownership group Ballcorps LLC, the city of Madison and Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama.

"This is the only minor league stadium in the country that they

sponsor," Cherry said. "That's something that (former Toyota Alabama plant president) David Fernandes advocated very hard for."

"We have a unique relationship with them, a very special relationship with them," Cherry said.

Dave Finch was named the new president in July 2019, coming from Toyota South Africa Motors, where he was the senior vice president of manufacturing.

The only Toyota engine plant that builds 4-cylinder, V6 and V8 engines under one roof, Toyota Alabama produced nearly 610,000 engines, or about 2,500 a day, last year.

"We now produce engines for five of the 10 Toyota vehicles built in North America," Ogle said. Those vehicles are the Tundra, Tacoma, Sequoia, Corolla and RAV 4.

Its new 4-cylinder line is scheduled to begin production this summer.

Building construction for the new V6 line is underway and scheduled to be completed in the fall, with trial production for the new V6 set to begin in the summer of 2021.



Battle

"When a company is looking at our community, and they see the depth of Toyota's investment here, they know this city has something to offer," Battle said. "Huntsville knows how to make things go and we do it better than anyone else," he said. "(From) NASA to Boeing, Toyota, Mazda Toyota, Blue Origin, Aerojet Rocketdyne and many more, Huntsville has a solidified its place as the propulsion capital of the world."

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‘IT TAKES TEAMWORK’

VP: Manufacturing blends many skills

Mazda Toyota’s Brazeal started career in textiles

By Marian Accardi
Staff Writer

Mark Brazeal started his manufacturing career working in a textile mill, and nearly 30 years later, he’s vice president of administration for Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA.

That’s the new joint venture company build-



Brazeal

Limestone County. The plant will manufacture Mazda and Toyota SUVs, with production scheduled to start next year.

The 50-year-old Northport native is responsible for all administration operations of Mazda Toyota, including human resources, safety, production control, environmental, accounting and external affairs. He was previously general manager at Toyota’s engine plants in Huntsville and Buffalo, West Virginia. He joined Toyota as manager of corporate administration in 2002, the year before production started at the Huntsville engine plant.

Earlier in his career, Brazeal worked in manufacturing jobs with Fruit of the Loom and Webasto Roof Systems, a Tier 1 supplier of sunroofs and roof

“What makes it unique is that it is a new vehicle plant in my home state that’s going to create a lot of opportunities for people in the state of Alabama.”

— Mark Brazeal, vice president of administration for Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA

systems for the automotive industry.

Brazeal reflected last month on his transition from textiles, the predominant manufacturing industry in the state of Alabama up until the early 2000s, to the automotive industry.

“The opportunity for me to make that transition from textile manufacturing to automotive came as a result of many, many people involved in economic development and many, many elected officials that supported economic development in their city and their county in the state,” Brazeal said.

The company plans to hire about 4,000 employees, and Brazeal said he’s proud that Mazda Toyota is providing so many job opportunities.

“But we’re definitely giving those job opportunities to people in the state of Alabama in partnership with the works and the efforts of people involved in economic development,” he said. “I’ll never lose sight of that.”

Question: What is rewarding about working in manufacturing?



A crane moves a pipe outside the paint building as part of continuing construction at the new Mazda Toyota plant in Limestone County. Mark Brazeal, vice president of administration for Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA, says he’s proud many jobs in the completed plant will be available to his fellow Alabamians. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

Answer: The environment of teamwork. That’s really why I wanted to go into manufacturing. It takes teamwork to produce anything, whether it’s spools of yarn — which was the first product that I worked in, a cotton mill — to engines, to SUVs. It doesn’t matter what product you’re manufacturing, it takes a work environment of teamwork — teamwork to build a good quality product, to ensure that the work site is safe, to make sure that all the different objectives and targets are accomplished. What I really, really

enjoy is the essence of teamwork that takes place in a manufacturing plant. That’s why I went into manufacturing and 27 years later, that’s why I’m still in it.

Q. What do you think when you visit the site (which Brazeal does weekly) and see the project taking shape?

A. It’s a lot to grasp very honestly because it’s such a dynamic work site. With the different buildings (under construction) and now, with the onsite supplier partners constructing their buildings, it can be a little bit overwhelming to think, how can we actually manage all of this

at one time? But again, no one person can. It’s through the collaborative teamwork, that’s how it’s accomplished. Without that belief in teamwork, it would be overwhelming.

I know it’s very, very challenging but I look at the team that we’re building and that’s what gives me the feeling of, yeah, we can do this. It’s not easy, but we can.”

Q. Is this a dream job, being part of a plant startup of this scale?

A. Without a doubt. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, that’s what it is. What makes it unique is that it is a new vehicle plant in my home state

that’s going to create a lot of opportunities for people in the state of Alabama. So it’s one of those great opportunities and great challenges at the same time.

I know the impact that Toyota plants have in communities and I know the impact that the engine plant has had in the Huntsville-North Alabama community so I know what’s coming. I’m very proud to be part of it. And I’m just one person in a 4,000-member team.”

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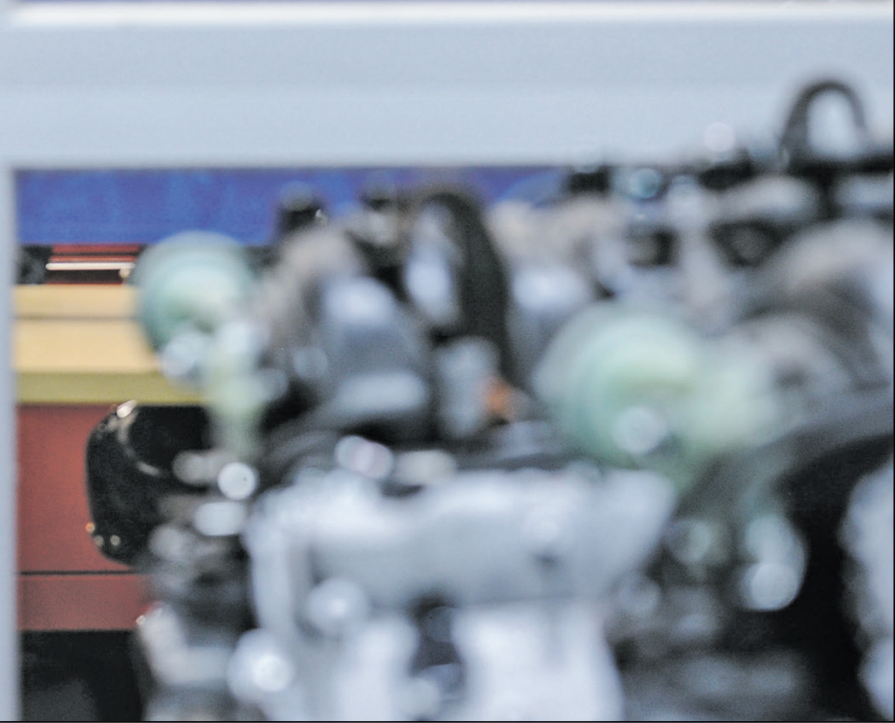
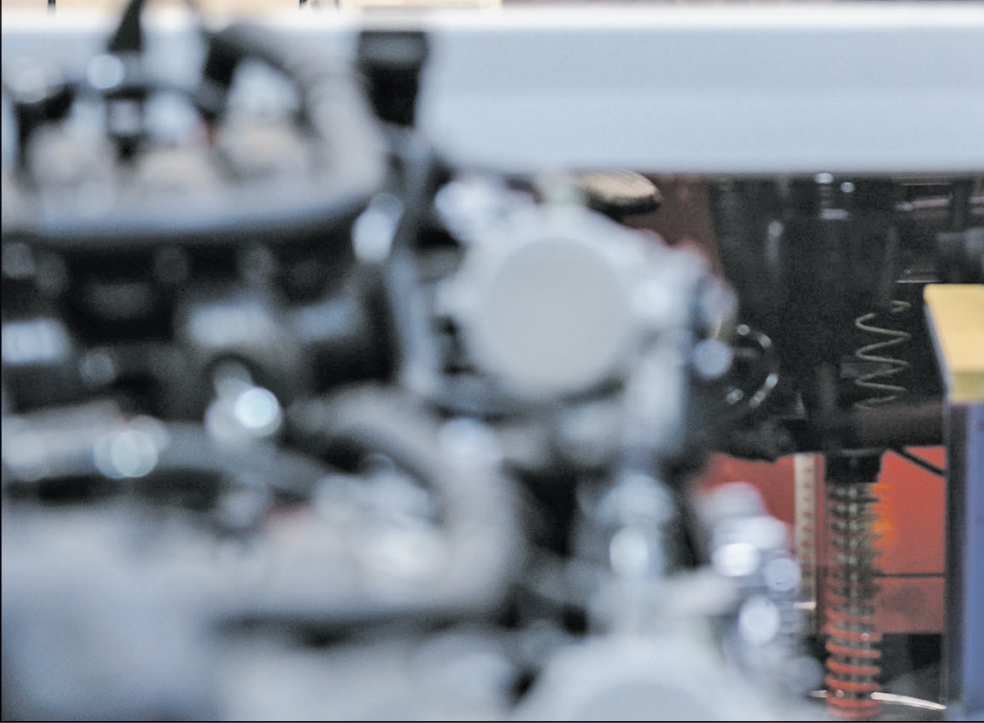
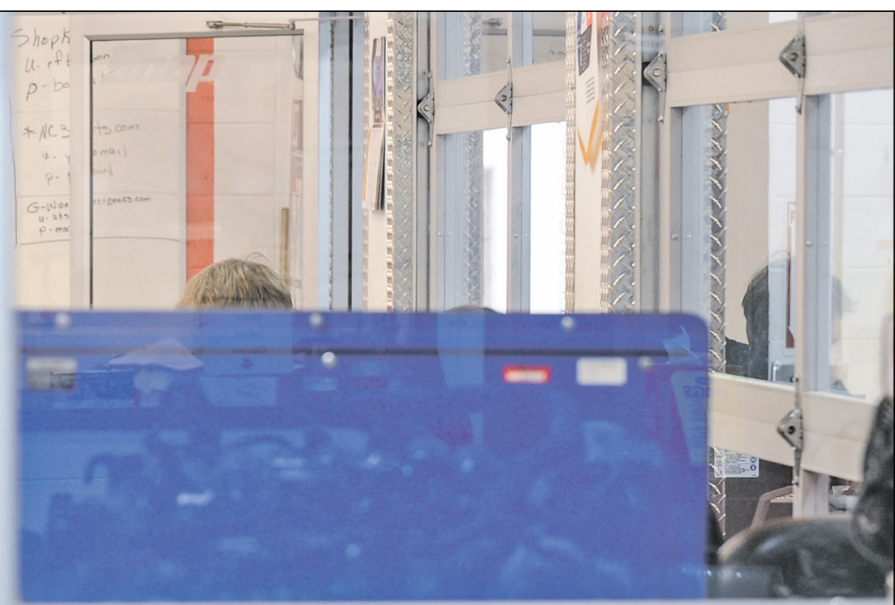
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ENGINES DRIVE TRAINING



Robert Bryson teaches an auto electronics class at Brewer High School. [PHOTOS BY JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

Morgan County students learn skills needed for auto industry

By Deangelo McDaniel
Staff Writer

FLORETTE — The overwhelming majority of the students who have come through the auto technology program at the Morgan County Schools Technology Park in the last four years can tear down a Toyota engine and identify the parts, school leaders said.

They can do this because in 2016, the Toyota engine plant in Huntsville gave the technology park 12 engines for students to work on, said Jeremy Childers, who is career tech and workforce development director for Morgan County Schools.

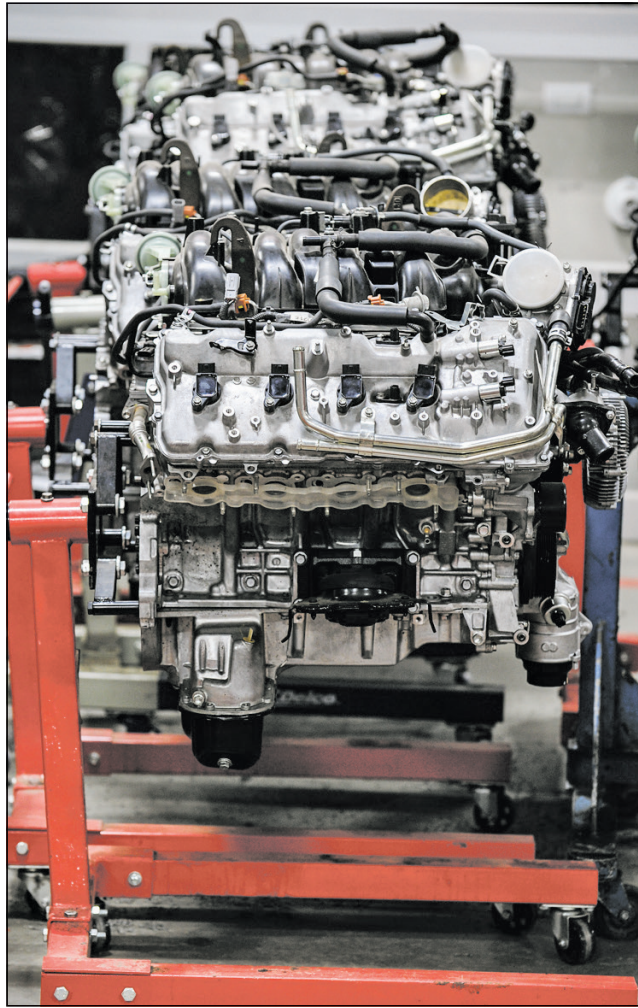
Robert Bryson, who has been a teacher in the auto tech program for 26 years, and Childers said they expect the hands-on experience students have received while working on Toyota engines should give them a leg up when they apply for jobs at the \$1.6 billion Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA plant under construction in the Huntsville-annexed part of Limestone County.

“We require them to identify the parts before reassembling them,” Bryson said.

The auto technology program, which is housed at Brewer High and available to every student in the Morgan County system, has been ranked as high as third nationally for training students.

Superintendent Bill Hopkins Jr. said he wants to turn the program into an employment pipeline for the Mazda Toyota plant.

“When announcements like the Mazda Toyota plant come, we need to make sure we have facilities in place to generate a qualified workforce,” Hopkins said. “I can assure you Morgan County Schools will do what it can to make sure every student who graduates from our school district will be ready if they want to seek employment



Auto Technology students at Brewer High School use motors donated by Toyota.

in the plant.”

The auto technology program for Morgan County Schools — which also includes an award-winning auto body class — has been in place since the 1970s, but went through a \$1 million makeover in 2016. Part of the change included the 12 engines the district received from Toyota.

“We train our students on the most advanced diagnostic machines in the industry,” Childers said.

As for the auto body collision program, it was one of three singled out by the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools in 2019 as models for other schools in Alabama.

Teacher Glenn Winton is a 2001 Brewer graduate who was in the auto body collision program when he was a student. Between his junior and senior years, he got a job in a body shop and is aware of the

opportunities for students.

Winton said businesses call him about every month looking for advanced students who can do body work.

He said the Toyota and Mazda plant will have robots that paint most of the vehicles, but every auto production plant has an onsite area that repaints about 5 percent of vehicles robots mess up.

“This is where I want this program to be part of the pipeline for workers in the Mazda Toyota plant,” Winton said.

An arm up

Morgan County’s automotive technology program also plans to train students on a smaller-scale version of a robot that the new Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA plant will use.

Morgan County used a \$40,000 grant it received



Morgan County Schools has acquired a smaller-scale version of a robot the new Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA plant will use. The robot is part of the Morgan County Schools Technology Park automotive technology program, which is located at Brewer High and open to students in the county and Hartselle City systems.

from Mazda Toyota to purchase the robot, and electronics teacher Greg Hudson went to Charlotte, North Carolina, for training so he could teach students.

Senior student Alex Cloer said the robot will allow students to take numbers and formulas they write on a board and program them into the robot’s computerized brain.

“We’ll know right away if what we are doing is correct,” he said.

Hudson, who lobbied school officials for the robot, said the hand-held control panel is the robot’s brain and is the same panel workers will use in the plant.

“I knew it would be a great benefit for our kids to get the experience,” Hudson said. “The only limit of the robot is our student’s ability to program it.”

The average salary at the plant is expected to be about \$50,000, not

including benefits.

Hopkins said the school system will continue to identify what students need to get jobs coming to the area and make sure training is available for them.

“Not every student is going to college, but it’s our responsibility to make sure they are prepared for a job,” he said.

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OPPORTUNITY 2020



Brewer High School's Automotive Technology students Casey Lamons, left, Lane Garrett and Bryson Holmes work on a car.

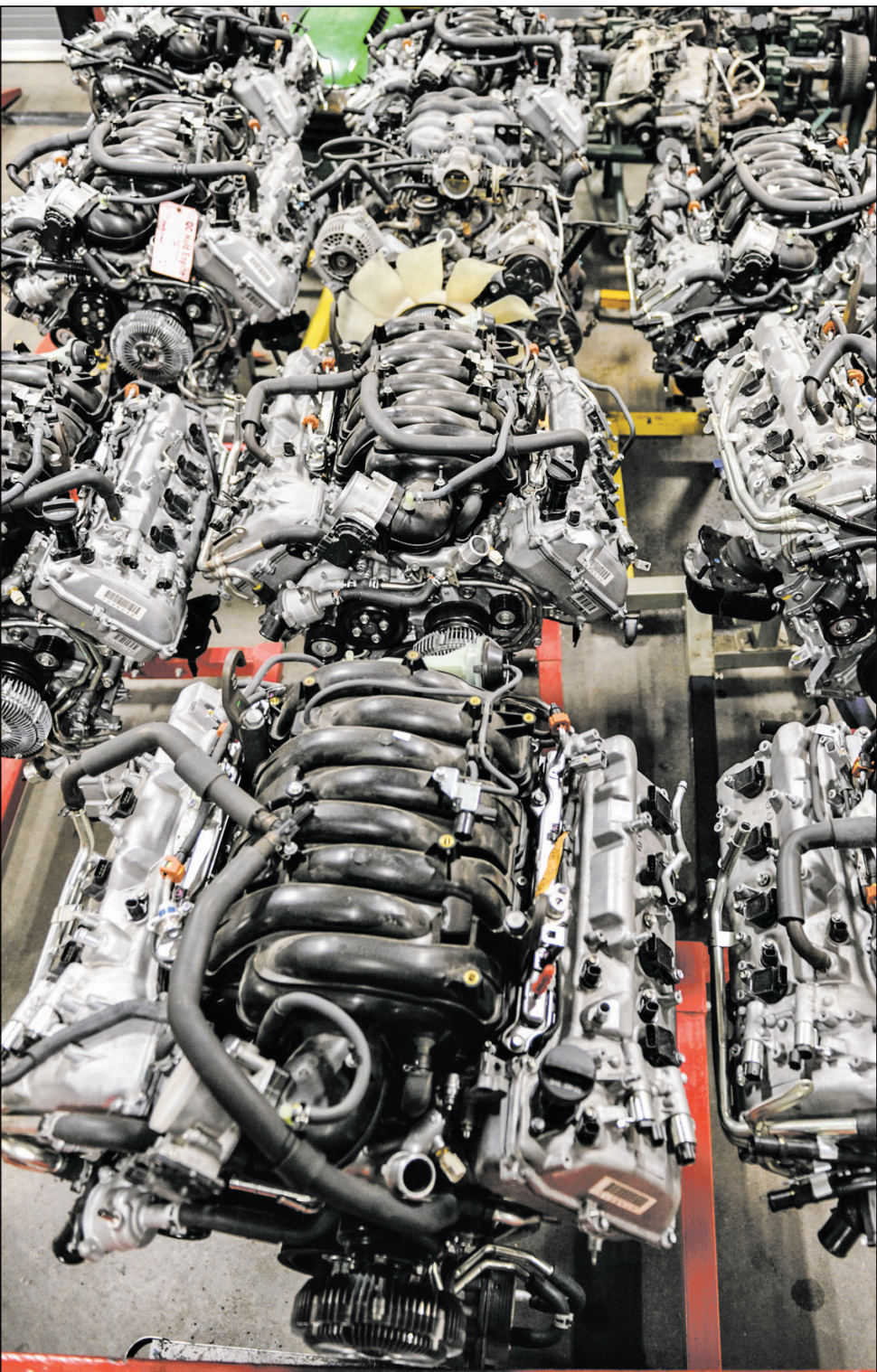


Trainers are available to students in the Auto Technology classroom at Brewer High.

The future is already here

Students at the Morgan County Schools' Technology Park automotive technology program are already working in the future because they train with Toyota engine and with a robotic arm that is a scaled-down version of one that will be used at Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA. The school district has been focused on producing a qualified workforce since the car manufacturer chose its north Alabama location.

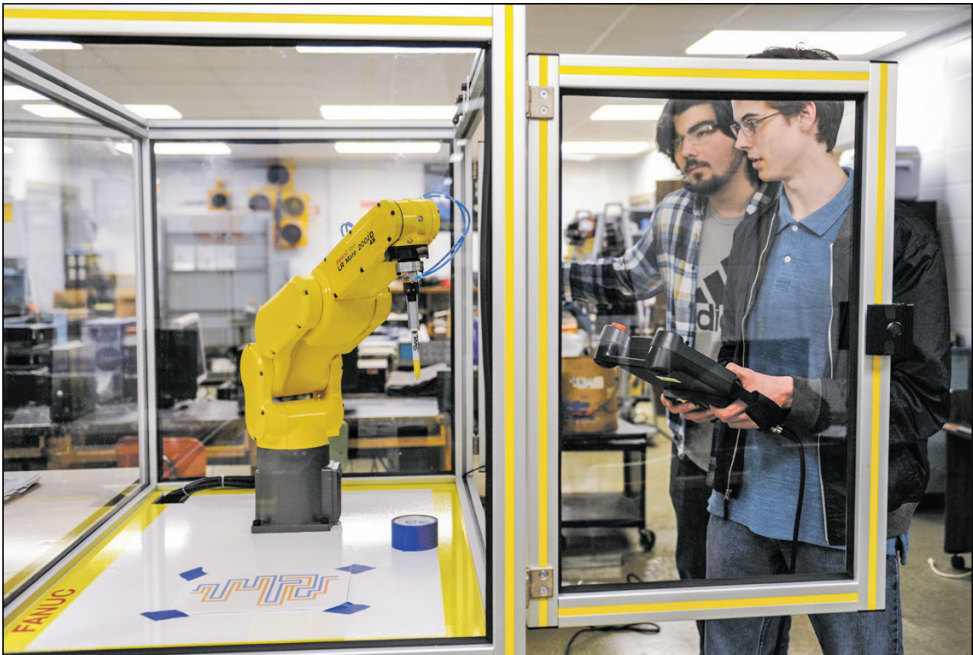
Photos by Jeronimo Nisa/DECATUR DAILY



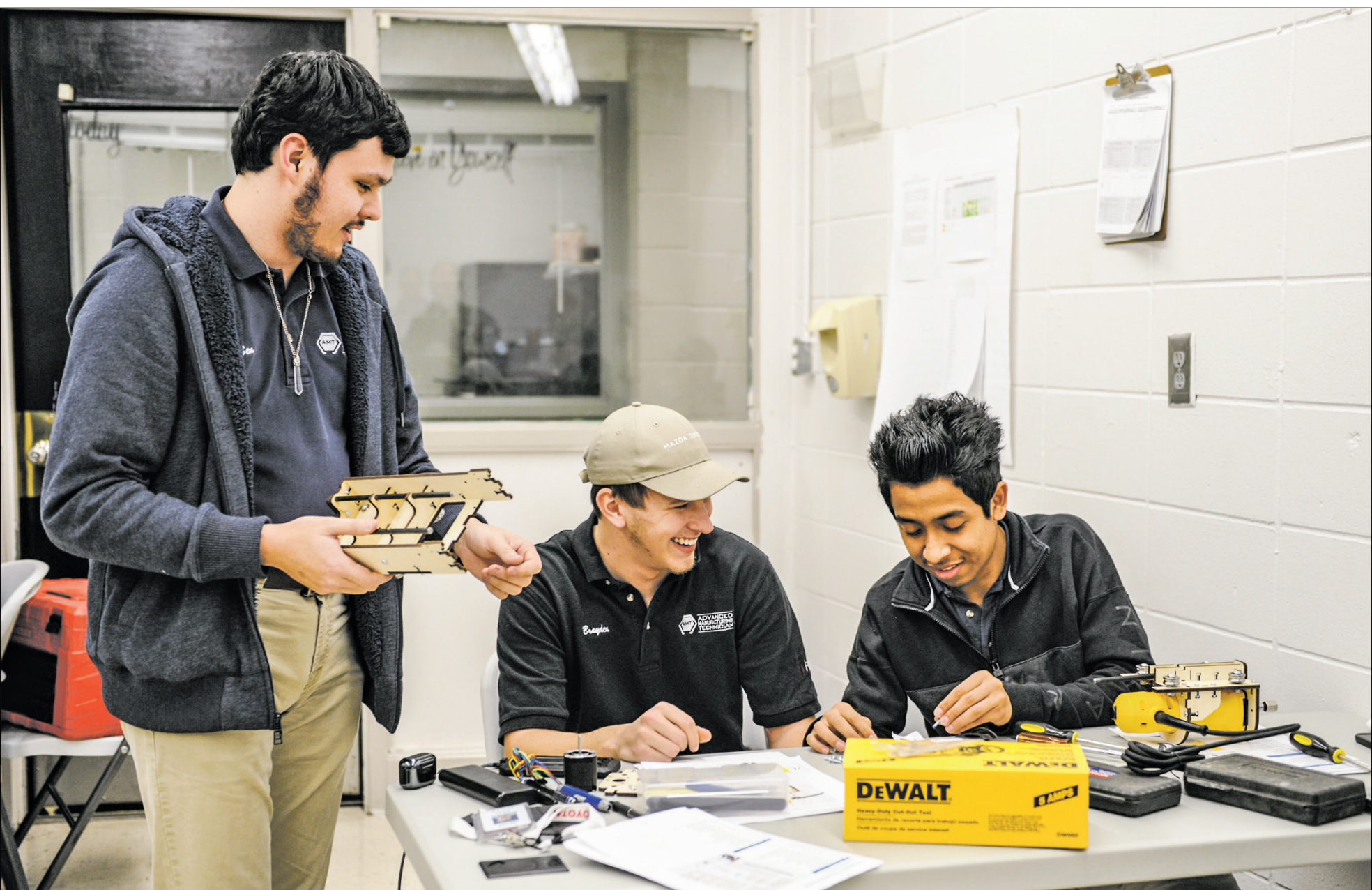
Auto Technology students at Brewer High use engines donated by the Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama plant in Huntsville.



Zac Medders works during an auto electronics class at Brewer High School.

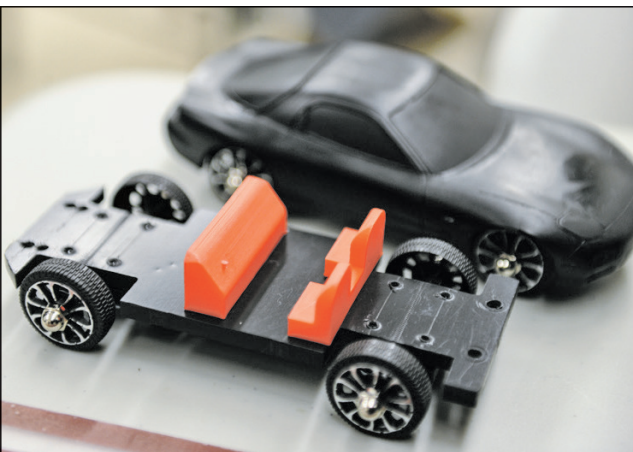


Brewer High School students Gavin Bailey, left, and Alex Cloer operate a robotic arm used in an electronics class. The arm is a scaled-down version of one that will be used at the new Mazda Toyota plant in Limestone County.



Ben Edger, left, Brayden Cothren and Erick Granados — Calhoun Community College Advanced Manufacturing students sponsored by Mazda Toyota — build a model assembly line for students at Limestone Career Technical Center to use. Cothren is also an alumnus of the Limestone Career Technical Center. [PHOTOS BY JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

Limestone career tech students get advanced manufacturing skills



These chassis pieces are part of the model assembly line being built for students at the Limestone Career Technical Center.

By Marian Accardi
Staff Writer

The Limestone County Career Technical Center's advanced manufacturing program, now in its second year, gets high school students ready for the next step, whether it's a job or a degree.

The program, first offered in the fall of 2018, is designed "to prepare our students to either go to work in industry using the skills we teach them or to build on those courses (and ultimately earn) an advanced manufacturing degree," said Vince Green, a director at the center that's located on Sanderfer Road on the south side of Athens.

Students can complete two classes a semester, and those who complete the program will earn dual enrollment credits at Calhoun Community College and receive a Certified Production Technician certification from the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC).

Students start as juniors and must be enrolled full time at an area high school and maintain a 2.5 grade point average.

The curriculum covers manufacturing safety practices, precision measurement instruments, quality control concepts and knowledge and skills related to maintenance awareness in a manufacturing environment.

Green met during the summer of 2018 with Scott Russo, who's now the skilled talent acquisition manager with

Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA; Lynn Lane, now Mazda Toyota's HR manager; and Calhoun Community College and state officials to start working out a plan to launch an advanced manufacturing program at the career tech center.

"John Holley (Calhoun's dean of technologies) was instrumental in making that happen because we didn't have a teaching unit" for the first group of students, "so he supplied an instructor from Calhoun to come and teach dual-enrollment courses to our first cohort," Green said.

A \$45,000 contribution to the school district from Mazda Toyota, which was announced at the company's ground-breaking ceremonies in 2018, helped to build the program.

There were just over 20 students in the program that fall.

Green said that last summer Holley and Barry May, the executive director of workforce and economic development for the Alabama Community College System, tweaked the courses to be more aligned with the MSSC curriculum.

About 35 are now enrolled in the advanced manufacturing program. In all, the center has 1,016 students, drawing from all six of the Limestone County Schools' high schools and Athens High.

The base credits can be used toward an associate degree from Calhoun.

The program is perfect for 18-year-old Elkmont High student Hunter

Bailey, who's in his second year in the program and working toward earning the CPT certification.

"I'm hoping to go into the FAME program and work at a company like Mazda Toyota or Polaris," he said.

Students accepted into the Alabama Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) Advanced Manufacturing Technician begin working with their sponsor company during the summer before beginning coursework through Calhoun Community College in the fall. Starting wages are competitive and there's the potential for students to receive performance-based raises and bonuses throughout the program.

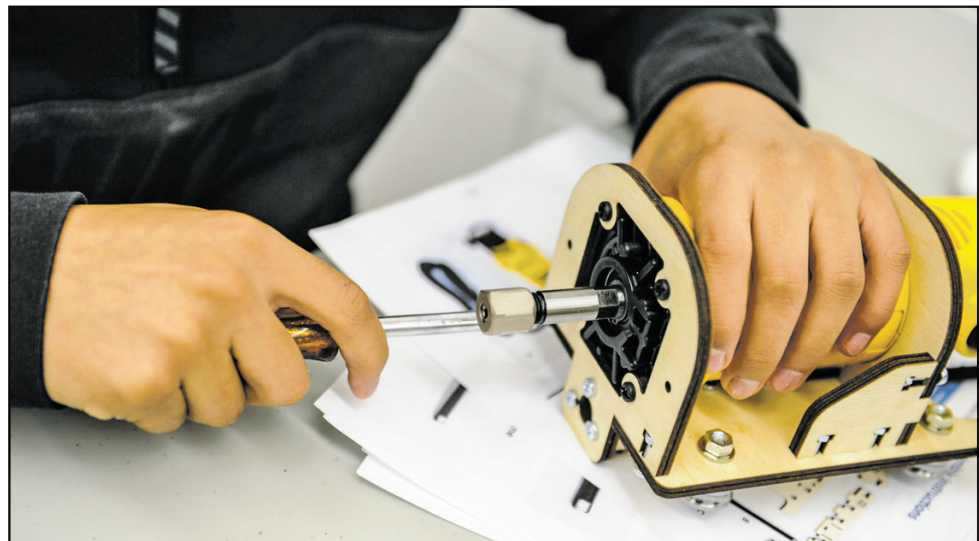
While not guaranteed, there is an option for sponsor companies to hire students upon graduation.

"We're doing something (at the tech center) that's never been done," Green said.

Nine FAME students whose sponsor company is Mazda Toyota are working toward an advanced manufacturing degree, and attend classes two days a week at the Robotics Technology Park and



Phillip Sulkowski, left, and Cody Tanksley — Calhoun Community College Advanced Manufacturing Technician students sponsored by Mazda Toyota — build a computer numeric control (CNC) router as part of a project to build a model of an assembly line for students at Limestone Career Technical Center to use. Sulkowski is also an alum of the Limestone Career Technical Center.



Erick Granados — a Calhoun Community College Advanced Manufacturing student sponsored by Mazda Toyota — helps build a model assembly line for students at the Limestone Career Technical Center.

work at the career tech center three days a week. They've designed and built a model of an assembly line for the advanced manufacturing students so they can learn about the manufacturing process and parts assembly.

Green believes that having the college-age FAME students at the center is a "great motivator" for the high schoolers.

"I'm able to learn something new every day," said Phillip Sulkowski, 19, an Athens High graduate who's enrolled in the

FAME program. "Each day is different."

Sulkowski enjoys collaborating with other students with different interests and skills who work together to reach the same goal.

He wants to get a full-time job with Mazda Toyota or another manufacturer and climb through the ranks of the company.

Green believes interest and enrollment in the advanced manufacturing program will continue to grow.

"There are going to be so many good jobs for the

students of Limestone County and Athens City right here in our backyard," Green said.

"Bottom line, we want to do what's best for students," he said. "If we're not doing what's best for students and meeting the needs of local industry, then we're not doing our job as a career tech center."

"We can change lives, literally change lives."

— marian.accardi@decaturdaily.com or 256-340-2438. Twitter @DD_MAccardi.



OPPORTUNITY 2020



Various robots from vendors demonstrate their abilities last month during Alabama Robotics Technology Park's 2.0 Launch. [DAN BUSEY/DECATUR DAILY]

AIDT, robotics park training Mazda Toyota's future employees

By Bayne Hughes
Staff Writer

Decatur's Alabama Robotics Park provides a unique free education for Mazda Toyota Manufacturing USA and other new and existing industries in the state.

Alabama Industrial Development and Training, which runs the robotics park on U.S. 31 North, also is helping Mazda

Toyota train its workers.

AIDT Executive Director Ed Castile said the state is leasing a temporary location in Huntsville until a training facility is built on the Mazda Toyota site.

At the robotics park on U.S. 31, Castile said, there is training space in



Castile

all three facilities that's available for the new plant.

The Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) program, sponsored by Toyota and conducted by Calhoun Community College, continues to use the robotics park.

About 50 students attend class two days a week at the RTP and work three days a week in

Toyota's Huntsville plant.

The park features more than \$40 million in robotics and automation. Park officials said recently the Robotics 2.0 Initiative will focus on making sure students are working on the latest and best robotics.

"We're upgrading pretty much all of the training," Castile said. "Everybody has automation, and it's rapidly changing. We're doing the 2.0 initiative to

help companies ease their employees into the new technology."

Work continues on repairing the Robotics Park phase 3 building, which was damaged when a truck collided with it. Castile said they're close to finishing the spray paint training in a portion of the building that wasn't damaged.

"The paint training was a request from all of the

automotive industry leaders in the state," Castile said.

The Phase 2 building offers space for Mazda Toyota or any other industries to set up and experiment with new operations before moving it to the main site.

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Promise of jobs lures students to local technology programs

By Calvin Cooley
For The Decatur Daily

The addition of Mazda Toyota to north Alabama's industrial landscape has come with much fanfare, with plans for the plant to employ about 4,000 workers when it reaches full operating capacity in 2021.

Officials with the plant said projections showed Mazda Toyota would need 40,000 applicants to fill those jobs because only 7 to 10 percent will pass the hiring process.

Locally, Calhoun Community College and the Alabama Robotics Technology Park facility are giving residents the opportunity to become attractive candidates for these jobs and further their career if they're able to get hired.

Mark Rose, an industrial technology instructor at Calhoun, said Mazda Toyota's decision to locate in the area has sparked an increased interest in electrical technology, process technology, industrial maintenance and robotics programs at the college.

"They are really ramping up the process of hiring and training for these manufacturing jobs now," Rose said. "I've currently got 20 students who are involved with the FAME program, and I have two colleagues who have 16 students. These Advanced Manufacturing Technician degrees can put these students in really great jobs."

Rose said programs like



The Alabama Robotics Technology Park is helping train students for jobs at Mazda Toyota and other local companies. [DECATUR DAILY/FILE]

Alabama FAME, designed by the Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education, can be lucrative for students.

"Typically, if students do it right, they can get on campus, out of school and into a good-paying job with zero student debt," he said. "The program allows students to earn money while they're in school, which can cover tuition, books and fees if they plan it correctly."

Statistics made available by FAME show that students can earn up to \$33,500 while enrolled through the program, which combines classroom instruction with on-site experience at manufacturing facilities in north Alabama.

"That kind of experience

and training goes a long way in the job market," Rose said.

Decatur native Ross Ingram has worked temporary manufacturing jobs at Kohler, AC Manufacturing and Toyota Motor Manufacturing in Huntsville and is hoping to get in the door early with Mazda Toyota.

"I'm sure they'll be overwhelmed with applicants, but I'm hoping my name and resume stand out," he said. "Those jobs are life-changing for some people in this area."

Rose said the influx of new manufacturing jobs can also create a revolving door of jobs at other places.

"When a new company comes in, you usually see some of the local workers move from other industries

to try to get in on the ground floor," he said. "That creates openings with other manufacturers, and those are good jobs, too."

Rose, who is also director of Tennessee Valley BEST Robotics, said his program at Calhoun has seen an increase in qualified students since local high schools have continued to place an emphasis on STEM-related studies.

"Many of those students come from BEST Robotics, so they're prepared for what the courses throw at them," Rose said. "These students are bright, but they're prepared because they are not completely new to what we are doing. That gives them advantage. These manufacturers want to fill these jobs with people

who are familiar with the processes."

Seth Shepherd, a professor of engineering at Defense Acquisition University and head judge of the annual Tennessee Valley BEST Robotics competition at Calhoun, agreed.

"In this area alone there are thousands of jobs that rely on STEM programs," he said. "TVA, ULA, the aerospace and defense industry on Redstone Arsenal, all of these places need workers with STEM degrees. These students are putting themselves in position for jobs like that, and the future that those jobs can provide."

Ingram said the Alabama Robotics Technology Park facility in Tanner has been instrumental to his career

growth.

"Being in and out of temporary jobs, I've been to four different classes at RTP," he said. "What they can teach you in there is amazing. The people at RTP and AIDT will have a big hand in what happens at Mazda Toyota, I'm sure."

Rose also said exposure to STEM-related activities, and nurturing student interest at the middle and high school level, can lead students to good jobs after high school and college.

"There are a lot of automotive manufacturing jobs in this area for STEM students," he said. "These are high-end jobs that require a certain knowledge and skill set that pay very well. I've had students graduate from this program who make more money than I do. When you're topping out at \$35 an hour plus overtime and benefits, that's hard to beat."

Seth Shepherd, a professor of engineering at Defense Acquisition University and head judge of the annual Tennessee Valley BEST Robotics competition at Calhoun, agreed.

"In this area alone there are thousands of jobs that rely on STEM programs," he said. "TVA, ULA, the aerospace and defense industry on Redstone Arsenal, all of these places need workers with STEM degrees. These students are putting themselves in position for jobs like that, and the future that those jobs can provide."



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