A RELATIONSHIP THAT BEGAN IN THE 20TH CENTURY

T
he southern U.S. states of Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and Florida share historical and cultural ties with Japan that date back to the early 20th Century. As the south’s economic strengths evolved through the decades, so have Japanese investments. The relationship started with Japan’s interest in the region’s agricultural exports, which later became fertile ground for Japanese manufacturers, carmakers and clean-technology companies.

"Each of those states has a strong relationship with Japan. While most people think first of huge economic benefits from positive Japan-U.S. relations, more importantly, this has resulted in Japanese companies being greatly contrib- uted to the expansion of their global businesses," Consul General of Japan in Nashville Hisayuki Kobayashi said. "The state’s strong labor envi- ronments, leading work-force training pro- grams, low utility costs and considerable incentives are re- factors that have made the region an attractive business and invest- ment destination."

"We will see more invest- ments in the Southern states as Japanese com- panies in the automotive industry, which is amalgam- ated by the future plant of Toyota in Tuscaloosa. And I hope that more south- ern states can take advantage of the unique opportuni- ties that will have significant impact on their economies, a base in Japan, as two-way investments will help us to expand our business rela- tionships," Kobayashi said.

Alabamians are the key reason Japanese investors choose Alabama: that the economic development community is prepared to receive Japan’s strict end-to-end require- ments when it comes to fulfill land, infrastructure, workforce and community support," Honorary Consul General of Japan in Birmingham Mark Jackson said. "This economic develop- ment community expects that Japanese suppliers to the major automotive manufac- turers in Alabama will follow and set up shop in the state in the short to me- diate.

Tennessee: Enhancing rural communities

Like in other states in the south, the state is the largest source of foreign direct investment in Tennessee, with 102 Japanese companies operating in the state and employing around 50,000 Tennesseeans. Tennessee’s economic development teams have been making a concerted effort to attract more Japanese investors especially as Japanese investments in neighboring states.

"The automotive corridors within the Southern United States that run east to west and north to south means that Mississippi is conve- niently integrated with the rest of America’s markets and supply chain. Japanese companies choose Mississippi’s 27 major, 320,000-square-foot, multi-use manufacturing and distribution, automotive and chemi- cal plants in the state. In the middle and southeast, the Magnolia State is excited to attract more investors especially as Japanese investors invest in neighboring states and regions.

Florida: Business-friendly environment

With more than 200 Japanese companies operating in the state on behalf of Japanese automakers, Florida has become an optimal and strategic state for Japanese busi- ness, including manufacturing, life sciences, aerospace and defense. In fact, many Japanese companies have used Florida as their head- quarters for Latin American operations.

As foreign investment from Japan has increased, recently appointed Consul General of Japan in Miami Kenji Hirata has stressed the importance of strengthening ties between Japan and the state.

"When it comes to eco- nomic relations, what we would like to do is to create a conducive environment for the support of free trade to strengthen Japanese invest- ment in Florida and Japanese ex- ports," Hirata said.

"There are a lot of oppor- tunities for Florida-Japan cooperation in the areas of water management, hos- pitality, and aerospace," he added.

With its business-friendly labor force, many companies are attract- ed to Florida. This has been shown by individuals who are also starting to relocate to Florida due to its qual- ity of life and great climate. Florida is such a diverse state. It now has the third highest number of Japanese in the U.S. and has grown to be one of the golf and tennis destinations. The state of Alabama and the town of Cullman have been very helpful, respectful and have all been key participants in the eco- nomic development here. And the Alabama Development Economic Development Training (ADET) is something that helps our state," Hirata said.

"Our promise is to do everything we can to exceed all our customers’ expectations regarding quality and delivery time. We must prove that our new plant is capable of meet- ing those expectations just like the rest of our facilities to gain the trust of our current and potential cus- tomers," Hirata added.

Topeka has found success in the ultra-high strength steel (UHSS) market, providing all its customers with a competitive edge through its highly versatile vehi- cles. Topeka has succeeded in the ultra-high strength steel (UHSS) market, providing all its customers with a competitive edge through its highly versatile vehicles. Topeka has succeeded in the ultra-high strength steel (UHSS) market, providing all its customers with a competitive edge through its highly versatile vehicles.

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FRANKLAND: THE PLACE FOR SPACE

Florida’s Space Coast is experiencing a renaissance in satellitronics as companies from outside the United States set their sights on the region. With the formation of the joint venture between Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and the U.S. subsidiary of General Electric, the region is poised to become a major player in the global aerospace industry.

MORRIS: PROVIDES CONNECTIVITY TO JAPANESE MANUFACTURERS

The Morristown area in eastern Tennessee has steadily grown in its global reputation as a leading manufacturing center since the early 1990s. Today, the area has almost 400 employees now, “more than double the number of people we served” said Director Kathy Price of the Blount Partnership, one of the region’s key economic developers.

PASCO EDC: DELEGATION VISITS JAPAN

A delegation from Pasco Economic Development Council visited Japan’s Kawasaki this month, led by Pasco EDC President and CEO Bill Cosentino. The delegation met with local officials and cutting-edge companies to discuss potential investment opportunities.

THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY (TVA) (Sponsored content)

TVA Senior Vice President for Economic Development John Braden said, “We’ve been in Japan for decades and have maintained strong growth in its operations. We are partnering with the state of Tennessee in order to address our workforce challenges with the help of Local University Education Program. We are partnering with the state of Tennessee in order to address our workforce challenges with the help of Local University Education Program.

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A GLOBAL BRAND WITH A SIGNIFICANT LOCAL IMPACT

Eighty-eight years since its founding in Japan, Bridgestone Corp. has become the world’s largest tire manufacturer, with 180 production and R&D facilities in 37 countries. Among the many milestones that propelled Bridgestone to its current position was its merger with Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. in 1988.

In 2018, approximately one out of every four passenger cars sold in the United States and Canada were rolled out with Bridgestone or Firestone tires. From its 35-story headquarters in downtown Nashville, Bridgestone Americas employs 2,200 people. The company also employs 2,800 at a tire plant in Aiken County, South Carolina, and Wilson County, North Carolina plants, which are produced in the United Kingdom, Continental Europe, and China.

In 2018, Bridgestone Americas announced a three-year, $40 million expansion.

“Our success is a reflection of our investments over a long period of time. It reflects really good global coordination within Bridgestone Americas, from our major R&D hubs and our key sites, from Tokyo and Rome,” Bridgestone Americas CEO and President Gordon Knapp said.

Bridgestone is committed to building a workforce that is as diverse as the customers it serves. Bridgestone is committed to building a workforce that is as diverse as the customers it serves.

To strengthen brand awareness, Bridgestone engages consumers through a variety of highly-visible sports partnerships. The company serves as the sole tire supplier for the NTT IndyCar Series and the iconic Indianapolis 500. Closer to home and among the Bridgestone Corporation’s North American and advantage over time to be in their community. We’re really proud to have been invited to participate in this project,” Knapp said.

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