



# THE PROVEN RESILIENCE OF THE MIDWEST STATES

Stretching from the vast expanse of the Appalachian Mountains in the east to the Rocky Mountains in the west, the Midwestern states have been traditionally referred to both as the country's bread basket and the manufacturing hub of the United States, supplying the country and the rest of the world with essential food and important machinery, vehicles and other finished goods.

Because of its excellent infrastructure and well-developed transport links, the centrally located region has become an important logistics center, a position that local and international businesses appreciated more in light of the protracted COVID-19 pandemic that strained supply chains across the globe and stunted economic growth.

However, more than two years into the pandemic, the states in the U.S. Midwest are showing signs of a strong recovery. Many businesses have seen new opportunities for growth and technological innovation, reminiscent of the boom that characterized the post-war era in the United States.

"Over the past five years, the number of locations of Japanese businesses and industries increased 23%, while the number of jobs grew 17%. In April 2021, Nippon Express built a logistics center in Wood Dale, Illinois (close to Chicago O'Hare International Airport), and moved its headquarters from New York to this new location," said **Consul General of Japan in Chicago Hiroshi Tajima**.

That same month, car giant Toyota announced an \$800 million investment to expand its manufacturing facility in Princeton, Indiana, a move that is expected to create 1,400 jobs. Meanwhile



Consul General of Japan in Chicago Hiroshi Tajima

in Nebraska, Kawasaki Motors Manufacturing will spend around \$200 million for an expansion program that will generate another 550 jobs.

"The Midwest region is a \$4 trillion economy. In terms of gross domestic product, it's on par with Germany and larger than France. Our population is on par with those two. Japan, on the other hand, is our No. 1 foreign direct investor," said **Midwest U.S.-Japan Association Chairman Gordon Dobie**.

"We have transitioned from the Rust Belt to the industrial heartland of the United States and an economic powerhouse. With something like 16,000 Japanese businesses here that employ 150,000 Americans, Japan has played a really important role in our development," Dobie also said. "During the pandemic, we had to sustain ourselves via digital, online means. In 2022, we will host our 52nd Annual Conference, to be held in Chicago, from September 11-13."

The rest of the numbers are also



Midwest U.S.-Japan Association Chairman Gordon Dobie

impressive. Over the past decade, Japanese foreign direct investment in the United States has nearly doubled, growing 183% to around \$679 billion. In 2019, of the 979,000 jobs created in the U.S., 527,000 were by Japanese manufacturers.

The Midwest's economic stability and growth, according to Tajima, would not have happened without close cooperation on both sides.

"I was really impressed by the welcoming of Japanese investment at the state and municipal levels, the long history of sister city relationships, and the abundance of Japan-related events across the region. I believe that strong ties between Japan and each of these states or regions will further strengthen the economies of Japan and the Midwest," the Japanese diplomat said.

"I'd like to strengthen our relationship not only with Japanese people here, but also with Japanese-Americans and other Americans who are interested in Japan. Take advantage of the



JETRO Chicago Chief Executive Director Ralph Inforzato

consulate. Please do not hesitate to contact us," Tajima also said.

Another well-known attitude of the Japanese toward business decisions is the long view on markets and their partnerships, which requires building trust and getting to know both sides deeply over many years.

"Get to know a Japanese-owned company in your area and interview the manager to see what he thinks about the community. Also, go interview Americans who run a business like yours and get their views about how to run a business in the United States. Seek out joint ventures between a Japanese and an American and find out where they may see new business opportunities," said **James McClung**, founder and CEO of global business advisory firm **Lismore International**, who is also a director of the Japan America Society of Chicago.

"One step that is often overlooked is the political. You need to know the government officials, whether it be the mayor, governor, senator or a State Department



Lismore International Inc. founder and CEO James McClung

official. That can make a huge difference because the information we get back becomes much broader and more insightful," McClung added.

**JETRO Chicago Chief Executive Director Ralph Inforzato** values that similar interaction between official channels: "In the Midwest, we reached out to Japan via digital videos. Of the eight states that took part, four videos were headlined by the governors of Nebraska, Michigan, Indiana and North Dakota. We succeeded in keeping communication links between Japan and the state and federal government officials during our JETRO Digital Investment Initiative. Those videos are still on our website."

Meanwhile, home-grown Geis Companies, now run by its third generation, is ready to expand its business beyond the Midwest and grow its international client base.

"Our goal is to expand our foreign relationships, no matter where that may be. If there's an international group looking to relocate or expand its operations, whether it's for distribution, manufacturing or for any other use, we want to be the company that is called first. We can help steer them in the right direction," **Managing Partner Conrad Geis** said. ■

# OMRON: KEEPING THE HEART OF THE MIDWEST BEATING

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to strain the global economy and its supply chain, **Omron Management Center of America** has addressed prevailing challenges by allowing more flexible work arrangements and adopting social media and digital marketing, fully aware that health and well-being have become the primary consideration of people.

In its health care business, Omron launched a "Going for Zero" mission for heart attacks and strokes. In the U.S., it rolled out VitalSight, a remote patient monitoring business designed to manage hypertension and foster increased patient-to-physician communication and data sharing to improve treatment engagement and health outcomes.

For nearly 50 years, Omron has invested in the future of heart health and has shaped this era of self-care. VitalSight was developed before the pandemic.

Located at its Americas headquarters in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, the Omron Automation Center is where customers and partners receive hands-on training, collaborate with experts and explore innovations in manufacturing and automation.

Omron Management Center of America works closely with 36 other automation centers around the world to host customers and provide engineering and application solutions to critical challenges, both in person and virtually.

In its automation and robotics business, Omron has strengthened its commitment to develop products and services that improve the lives of society as a whole. Because of a shortage in manpower in the automation sector, Omron ventured into collaborative robotics, which will result in a more efficient and sophisticated manufacturing industry.

For **Chairman and CEO Nigel Blakeway**, while Omron Management Center of America has incorporated robotics in its warehouses and manufacturing sites, the company still gives more importance to its human capital.

"What is working for us is developing our people's talent, continuing to meet our



Omron Management Center of America Chairman and CEO Nigel Blakeway

environmental sustainability goals and continuing to be a socially responsible company," Blakeway said.

In the last five years, amid rapid changes in the global economy and society, Omron remains faithful to its founder's call to adopt a complete view of what is happening in all stages of the economy and all the needs of society. With the growth of the autonomous society, safety is paramount.

"Because automation has increased in the workplace, bringing in more human workers means we also have preventative safety in that environment," Blakeway said.

On doing business in the Midwest, Blakeway stressed, "It has been such a positive environment for us in terms of talent as we work with the top universities and several engineering companies here in the region." ■

→ <https://www.omron.com/global/en>



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# THE KEY TO WINNING LEGAL DISPUTES: LITIGATION STRATEGY

**Kitagawa & Ebert** is one of the few American law firms that has won many trials and arbitrations for prominent Japanese business clients in federal courts and arbitrations in multiple states in the USA. The firm has lawyers licensed in California, Texas, Georgia, New York, Michigan, Nevada and Alabama and among the very few who are admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court.

"In the USA, only 1% of civil cases go to trial, so very few U.S. lawyers have actual trial and arbitration experience," stressed partner **Lisa Kitagawa**, who is the third of only four American lawyers to have graduated from Kyoto University. She also attended the University of Tokyo. Partner **James Ebert**, who also attended Kyoto University, is a lawyer and a Certified Public Accountant.

"Japanese bilingual lawyers are typically limited to transactional matters or participate only as interpreters or observers because they lack the fluency in Legal English, as well as skills in legal research, strategy, writing and litigation, all required for complex business litigation, trials and arbitrations. Most Japanese bilingual lawyers lack litigation or actual trial and arbitration experience, and do not have a deep understanding of U.S. history and business culture," Kitagawa said.

"Japanese businesses engage our firm for guidance with business legal risk management and entrust us with complex business litigation matters because we are experienced U.S.

business lawyers who win difficult trials and arbitrations. We are respected for our winning strategies and ability to communicate persuasively and respectfully with clients, opposing lawyers, judges and arbitrators. We skillfully navigate through complex business matters and build bridges so that our clients succeed and win," she added.

Because of its sophisticated utilization of technology, despite the pandemic, the firm continues to grow and expand its Japanese client base, which encompasses a broad spectrum of industries, including energy, technology, automobiles, logistics, manufacturing, food, pharmaceuticals, real estate, finance, investment, entertainment, the internet, biotechnology, construction, design, engineering and banking.

"With our firm's extensive business experience, Japanese bilingual team, and understanding of U.S. and Japan cultures, we are successful in winning complex business disputes. We also have a busy transactional business practice in contracts, corporate, real estate, employment and other matters," Kitagawa said.

"We understand the complexities of doing business in the USA. We provide experienced business strategies including risk management for our clients' success in the USA," she added. ■

→ <http://www.japanuslaw.com>



Kitagawa & Ebert Partners Lisa Kitagawa and James Ebert

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# SOUTHERN ILLINOIS: A PLACE TO PROSPER

At the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, Southern Illinois is centrally located in the Midwest. Its vast transportation network includes four port districts, three interstate highways, three railroads and two airports. Southern Illinois is within driving distance of major metropolitan areas, including St. Louis (160 kilometers), Nashville (320 kilometers) and Chicago (480 kilometers).

The region boasts a highly educated and trained workforce as it is home to Southern Illinois University, ranked in the top 4% of U.S. higher education institutions for research, as well as a strong network of four regional community colleges offering 45 technical career certificates.

Recognized for its strong academic programs in automotive technology, aviation, fermentation science and engineering, SIU is a proud host to thousands of international faculty and students, and has active partnerships with Nagoya University and Meiji University in Japan.

Southern Illinois offers a high quality of life, low cost of living, excellent health care services and ample recreation opportunities in the Shawnee National Forest.

Home to three Aisin Group manufacturing facilities, the region sees many future opportunities for collaboration with other Japanese investors in sustainable energy and electrification, value-added agriculture, manufacturing and supply chain logistics. ■

→ <https://siu.edu>  
→ [www.southernillinoisnow.org](http://www.southernillinoisnow.org)



Southern Illinois University Carbondale has a long, proud history of contributing economically and socially to the region and the state.

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## UW–MADISON: SIGHTS SET ON JAPAN AND THE WORLD

Established in 1848, **University of Wisconsin–Madison** lives up to the state's growing reputation as one of the country's leading centers for education and innovation. Among its most sought-out degrees and programs are those in engineering, medicine, science, law and public administration, in addition to computer science, data management, and information sciences.

To date, UW–Madison has 13 schools and colleges offering more than 250 undergraduate degrees and certificates and more than 250 master's, doctoral and professional programs to over 40,000 students.

With a strong international student and alumni base and as a leader in study abroad, UW–Madison has fostered a wide international network that includes many Japanese partners. That openness has helped raise the profile of UW–Madison across the world and in the United States, where it is among the top-ranked public universities.

The university is also a leader in language education and research, boasting one of the most comprehensive Japanese programs in the U.S. Language study prepares students to become outstanding leaders who are engaged locally, nationally, and globally.

With its private-sector, research and non-profit partners, the university also offers excellent internship programs abroad. Central Japan Railway Co. has hosted the university's interns since 2000, making it the longest-running program, as well as the most competitive.

"Demand for internships in Japan has been increasing year after year. We have also been successful in offering virtual internships with partners based in Japan. This not only addressed COVID-19 travel restrictions, but also makes it accessible to more students. And we're looking forward to resuming in-person programs as soon as we can," said **Michelle Kern Hall, director of the International Internship Program** and a graduate of UW–Madison's Japanese program.

"Japan is our top destination for internships abroad for a reason. We're very eager to hear from new partners who see value in working with UW–Madison students and in strengthening their connections with Wisconsin and the Midwest. We value the great opportunities that already exist and want to continue to build on that momentum," she added.

Visit <https://go.wisc.edu/iip-japan-partner> to learn more. ■



University of Wisconsin–Madison's iconic Bascom Hall in the summer

## TERRE HAUTE BUILDS QUICKLY AND DIGS DEEP FOR GROWTH



Terre Haute Economic Development Corp. President Steve Witt

As the largest community in west central Indiana, **Terre Haute** is a metropolitan, family-friendly area with a very diverse economy. The city's largest employers include U.S. and Japanese companies, such as Advanced Intelligent Chassis Systems, Sony DADC, Steel Dynamics, GE Aviation and Hearshide Foods.

Another significant sector of the economy is higher education. Terre Haute features four higher-education institutions, including Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, which has been ranked by U.S. News & World Report's Best Colleges Guide as the top undergraduate institution for engineering, math and science in the country for the 21st straight year.

In the manufacturing sector, Steel Dynamics is one of Terre Haute's most cited success stories. From its original 74,300-square-meter facility, SDI rolls out light-gauge galvanized and cold-rolled steel products.

"From the time the first shovel went into the ground to the time the first coil of steel came out of the door, it took only 14 months," said **Terre Haute Economic Development Corp. President Steve Witt**.

To accommodate the construction of Steel Dynamics' facility, Vigo County built a 4-kilometer-long, 25-centimeter-thick reinforced concrete thoroughfare through its industrial park as well as nearly 1,600 meters of new rail line and other significant infrastructure.

"To do all that in just 14 months, I think it was tremendous. That demonstrates our ability to get things done," Witt said. ■

→ <http://terrehauteedc.com>



## CINTER TECHNOLOGY PLANTS ITS ROOTS IN MIDDLE AMERICA

When Japanese computer scientist **Hiroaki Yamaguchi** was looking for the ideal site to grow his new business, he chose Cincinnati because of its location in the heart of the

United States and the abundance of tech workers in one of the country's most populous cities.

Since starting operations in 2013, **Cinter Technology** has grown into a multinational with offices in nine locations, including in New York and California. To meet growing demand in his home country, Yamaguchi opened a branch in Yokohama in 2019. As a comprehensive provider of technology services, the company also set up Cinter Careers, which focuses on supplying tech workers for various clients and companies.

"Our strengths are project management. We understand what top managers need and then relaying those needs down to the development team or the engineering team, while making sure that the project runs on time and within budget," said the president and chief executive officer.

To date, Cinter Technology sees 100% of its revenues coming from Japanese enterprises that operate in the United States, although it has also formed partnerships with IT businesses in Japan to facilitate the digitalization of its clients for the U.S. and Japanese markets.

"I like to connect with a lot of people around the world. That is the goal for me," said Yamaguchi, who believes that excellent customer service and high-quality engineering have been crucial to Cinter's success for more than a decade.

In line with his commitment to expand the business around the world, Cinter has begun exploring the Latin American market for companies looking for state-of-the-art technology and seasoned experts to grow their clientele and widen their presence around the globe. ■

→ <https://technology.cinter.net>



Cinter Technology President and CEO Hiroaki Yamaguchi



## GEIS COMPANIES: EXPERTS IN DESIGN & BUILD DEVELOPMENT, CONSTRUCTION & PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Established in 1967, **Geis Companies** began as a modest building firm that has grown into a full-service design and build company with five separate vertical businesses: building and construction; in-house architecture and engineering; property acquisition and development; property management and relocation services; and interior design and procurement.

**Managing Partner and Director Conrad Geis**, a third-generation descendant of founder Erwin Geis, attributes the group's longevity to its commitment to meet clients' needs and a passion for personalizing its approach to deliver superior results.

"Our 'full-cycle' approach to solutions for clients starts with design/build development services, financing assistance, and providing property management and leasing services. We have many repeat clients, both domestic and international, which is what our client base is built on," Geis said.

"That was my grandparents' vision: Whenever a client walks through our door, we should be able to help in whatever capacity necessary. This is what we're doing across the country. We are now licensed in 42 states," he added.

Over the last 55 years, the family-owned corporation oversees 167 talented employees working in offices located in Ohio, Florida, New Jersey and California, having developed more than 15,300 acres (6,192 hectares) of land and designed and built 1,172 projects. ■

→ <https://www.geiscompanies.com>



Geis Companies Managing Partner and Director Conrad Geis

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## CITY OF LAFAYETTE CONTINUES TO CELEBRATE ECONOMIC SUCCESS

Located between Indianapolis and Chicago, the **City of Lafayette**, Indiana, has developed into a thriving and growing metropolitan area because of its continuing recruitment and the success of national and international businesses in the area.

Due to its proximity to Purdue University, well known for its engineering, research, technology and agriculture programs, Lafayette has attracted a diverse range of Fortune 500 companies, including GE Aviation, Caterpillar, Wabash National, SAAB, Rolls Royce and most notably Subaru.

"As a flourishing, progressive manufacturing community with a state-of-the-art infrastructure built for future growth, Lafayette has enhanced its economy and quality of life initiatives to become one of the premier cities in the Midwest. We boast outstanding parks and recreation amenities, cultural arts and entertainment venues, a thriving historic downtown, affordable housing, best-in-class education and attractive business and employment opportunities," **Mayor Tony Roswarski** said.

From 2015 to 2020, the city secured \$889.5 million in public investments and \$1.5 billion in private-sector investments. Local school corporations have spent more than \$355 million to improve and expand their projects, like establishing an innovative career academy to meet the growing needs and interests of students seeking the advanced technical skills required in today's economy.

Greater Lafayette's success is attributed to the close collaboration of three local governments that prioritize their businesses, communities, constituents (Lafayette, West Lafayette and Tippecanoe County) and their partnerships with Purdue University.

For its efforts, Lafayette was named among the Top 10 Cities to Live in Indiana by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and among the 10 Best Small Places for Business and Career by Forbes magazine for five



Lafayette Mayor Tony Roswarski speaks at the unveiling of the Subaru Ascent vehicle. Seated behind Mayor Roswarski is Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb.

straight years. In 2021, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce named Greater Lafayette as the Community of the Year. ■

→ [www.greaterlafayetteind.com](http://www.greaterlafayetteind.com)



## DYNAMISM AND DIVERSITY IN WABASH COUNTY

Just a short drive north of the state capital Indianapolis, **Wabash County** stands out as one of northeast Indiana's most promising economic communities for growth and prosperity.

As the birthplace of companies like Honeywell International, Ford Meter Box Company and the makers of 5-hour Energy, Wabash County's history is steeped in entrepreneurial spirit. With a powerful blend of small businesses, large operations and municipal partners eager to help those businesses succeed, Wabash County has proven itself as the ideal location for Japan-based businesses of all sizes to grow and thrive.

"Wabash County's scope has expanded well beyond the borders of Indiana. Our efforts to bring the world to Wabash County and in

turn, bring Wabash County to the world are paying dividends. We are forging strong bonds with Japanese communities, companies and schools with added support from Japanese-language classes, exchange programs and other support services. Grow Wabash County also hosts the annual Japan-Northeast Indiana Summit annually to strengthen these relationships," said **Grow Wabash County President and CEO Keith A. Gillenwater**.

"Wabash County's network of highways and railroads, combined with access to water ports on the Great Lakes and international airports, makes exporting goods to the world easy. Come see the wonders of Wabash County for yourself," Gillenwater added. ■

→ [www.growwabashcounty.com](http://www.growwabashcounty.com)



Representatives from the City of Wabash and Grow Wabash County enjoy a farewell luncheon with former Consul-General of Japan in Chicago Naoki Ito (front row, second from right) at his official residence.



Groundbreakings, ribbon cuttings and grand openings are always major events in Wabash County to welcome new businesses and celebrate the growth of existing ones.

## SHELBYVILLE THRIVES ON DIVERSITY, INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY



Shelbyville Mayor Tom DeBaun

Celebrating its bicentennial this year, **Shelbyville**, Indiana, has benefited because of its location in the economic heartland of the United States. Having gained the confidence of the community's long-standing partners, Mayor Tom DeBaun has now trained his focus on holistic growth to ensure the long-term future of the city.

While Shelbyville stays closely engaged with companies by constantly seeking feedback from all its stakeholders, the city has increased investments in developing its human capital and in improving the quality of life of its residents. Amid the steady growth in travel between the city and two adjacent counties, officials have begun infrastructure projects to ease travel for commuters.

And as industry became the main driver of economic growth, Shelbyville has reclassified a lot of its farmland for greenfield development to welcome new investors, resulting

in new opportunities for construction and engineering companies to build needed infrastructure.

"Because sustainability is key to most decision-making, we have spent a significant amount of time, effort and resources on things that attract top talent the most, such as housing, education, quality of life and the overall holistic vibe of the community. Being open and accepting has been a key strength of Shelbyville," DeBaun explained.

"Diversity has been a big driver for us in the last 10 years. The city will continue to focus on attracting top talent, work closely with companies that have come in, take in the feedback it receives from the community, and stay the course with our efforts. Shelbyville hopes to see more diversification in the industries we welcome," DeBaun added. ■

→ <https://www.cityofshelbyvillein.com>



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[southernillinoisnow.org](http://southernillinoisnow.org)



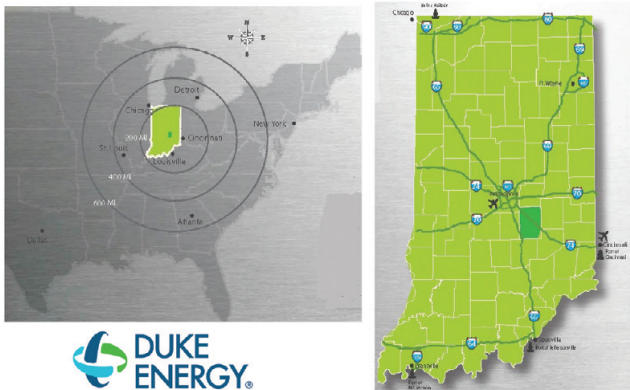
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