

# Legendary Location

From Alabama's First Industrial Site to its Newest Golf Course, Prattville Is a Leader

BY ANN HALPERN

**N**amed for Daniel Pratt who came to Alabama in 1833 to build and sell cotton gins, Prattville has grown and thrived. "We are the birthplace of industry for the state," says Connie Bainbridge, economic development director for the Prattville Area Chamber of Commerce.

Today the Daniel Pratt Historic District is being revitalized to preserve Prattville's legacy. Now known as The Preferred Community, Prattville was long called The Fountain City because of its numerous artesian wells. "There are still a tremendous number of artesian wells throughout the downtown area," says Prattville Mayor Jim Byard Jr.

The city still has its pro-business attitude. "We're putting all the pieces in place so it make sense for businesses to be in Prattville," says Bainbridge. "We have elected and business leadership in place that understands business."

Mayor Byard identifies four components that are moving Prattville forward. "We have a product. We have leadership and we have a team in place," he says, identifying city, county and state elected officials as part of the team. Byard calls the economic development staff at the Chamber of Commerce the fourth element driving business growth.

## REGIONAL FOCUS

Bainbridge calls Byard a regional leader with a proven track record demonstrating that Prattville can cross political boundaries to function as part of a team. "We have embraced regionalism and it's paying off for us," she says. "We've got youthful, visionary leaders and it's making a difference."

Byard admits that Prattville has only recently begun to think regionally. "We've realized that we are part of a region. What's good for Montgomery is good for Prattville."

Take the recent announcement of a \$1 billion Hyundai plant for Montgomery. Bainbridge says the plant will "provide job

opportunities to our citizens because the site is nearby in our sister city of Montgomery. We have over 700 acres of property in our industrial parks and we think our area would make an ideal location for a Hyundai supplier. We can pull a work force from counties to the north of us on I-65 and have three counties with [higher than normal] unemployment rates around us. And Prattville has a great school system and offers a small town environment for the Hyundai leadership



**Located on Autauga Creek, the Pratt Gin Factory complex (above) includes two structures surviving from the original antebellum establishment, and three others that were built between 1896 and around 1925. Today, developers have plans to transform the buildings into living and office space.**

who might choose our area to live in."

Byard cites the 2001 BUY.COM Golf Championship as an example of regional cooperation. That event involved three counties and several communities. "It's the first time we all came together as one community with one goal," he says. "The entire region benefited."

Byard believes the proven ability to work together will further benefit the region. "We have history, relationships

and trust now," he says. "That's very important, whether we're dealing with garbage pickup or the possibility of a large car manufacturer coming into the area."

"Our mayor brought all the mayors together for the tri-county area," says Bainbridge. "When people put their money on the table, you know you've got regionalism. It's not about lip service, it's about leveraging your dollars together."

Other examples of regional cooperation include the county and city jointly funding a metro jail and the city running sewer lines to a new county park. "We're cutting edge when it comes to regionalism and working together," says Bainbridge. "What matters is the goal."

## POWER SOURCE

Both of Prattville's independent power producers, Tenaska and Southern Company, are building new facilities. "There's over \$1 billion worth of infrastructure capital investment coming out of the ground in the county," says Bainbridge.

The largest combined-cycle plant ever built in Alabama by a non-utility company will be completed this spring. Tenaska Energy Inc. is building the Lindsay Hill Generating Station in Autauga County. Work on a second Tenaska plant began in June 2001 and is slated for completion by spring 2003.

Southern Company is building a natural-gas-fired generating facility in Autauga County. Owned and operated by Alabama Power, the plant will help meet growing customer demands for electricity. The first block of the \$500 million capital investment is scheduled for completion by the summer of 2003.

## ROOM TO GROW

Prattville is investing heavily in new industrial property. "We've added about 500 acres of city or county-owned industrial property," says Bainbridge. Much of the expansion is in South Industrial Park that has major gas and transmission lines plus CSX and Norfolk Southern rail service. Both Interstate 65 Industrial Park and West Industrial Park offer excellent highway access.

According to county commission Chairman Clyde Chambliss Jr., light manufacturing and telecommunications businesses such as call centers will find these industrial park sites ideal for their use. "We have excellent telecommunications infrastructure," he says.

In early summer, development begins for Legends Office Park adjacent to the Capitol Hill golf course. "There's not another office park comparable to it in central Alabama," says developer Joe Turner of All South Realty. "It's an 89-acre site with spectacular views of the golf course, the conference center and the Montgomery skyline." Turner says the park will be an ideal setting for a corporate headquarters. "We haven't started marketing it yet and we've already been contacted by four companies." They are seeking 15,000 to 30,000 square feet and more. The site should be ready for building construction by fall.

## HEALTHY ECONOMY

Mayor Byard says the economy locally has three strong components. Besides the plastics industry and International Paper, Prattville's economy is driven by state and federal jobs just across the river in the capital city of Montgomery.



**The Capitol Hill golf course, the newest facility on the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, includes three 18-hole championship courses.**

Bemis Company expanded its polyurethane products operations with its Prattville plant. This facility provides flexible plastic packaging for such products as ice, seed, poultry, food, disposable diapers and more.

"We're thrilled to have Bemis," says Bainbridge, identifying it as one of a cluster of plastics firms here. Even in the current economy, companies like Bemis, Arkay and Flexicon are seeing increased business and employment. "A lot of communities are hearing talk about doing expansions or putting more people to work," she says. "We are."

The automotive business is represented in the

area, too. Haldex, a brake product manufacturer, completed a \$10 million 75,000-square-foot expansion last year. "We have installed state-of-the-art carousel molding systems," says Tom Barthel, manager of human resources. With 19 molds, the circular continuous-process system turns out a finished brake part every six seconds.

Barthel says Haldex reflects the area's steady economy. The Haldex plant has kept its 300 employees steadily employed and anticipates an upturn in sales and manpower.

## COTTON RULES

Agriculture still fuels the local economy. "Cotton is the major crop in the county," says Jimmy Sanford, president of HOME Place Farms, Inc. He is a fourth-generation cotton farmer whose great

"We're pursuing tourism as a component of economic development," says Bainbridge. "Of course the golf course and The Legends Conference Center have been the catalyst." In recent years, Prattville has added more than 300 motel rooms, increasing lodging tax revenue by 200 percent.

The Capitol Hill golf course, the newest facility on the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, includes three 18-hole championship courses. The Senator Course is rated in the Top 10 New Public Courses by *Golf Magazine* in 2000. The Legislator Course rated in the Top 10 Best New Courses by *Golf Magazine* in 2001.

Located at the Capitol Hill golf course, The Legends Conference Center is a \$12.5 million facility on 14 acres along the 17th fairway of the Senator Course. It features a 120-seat auditorium/banquet room and state-of-the-art conference facilities. Lodging options include 75 rooms, suites and two eight-room villas.

The Economic Development Partnership of Alabama (EDPA) built The Legends at Capitol Hill. "The Partnership has been involved in this community in a very tangible way, very beneficial to our community," says Sanford. He is vice president and a member of the board of directors of EDPA, an organization in which he has played an instrumental role since its inception. Sanford recently was named Alabama's Economic Development Volunteer of the Year by the Economic Development Association of Alabama.

"We're being proactive in the tourism arena," says the Chamber's Bainbridge. The city has landed the BASS Alabama Federation Championship fishing tournament in October. Success with the 2001 BUY.COM Golf Championship is paying off. The tournament returns to Capitol Hill in October.

"Although we're a community of close to 30,000, our quality of life gives us a hometown feel," says Mayor Byard. He lists a strong school system, solid business climate and heritage as contributors to a good life here.

"One of the biggest assets we have is our quality of life," agrees county commission Chairman Chambliss. "We have big city amenities and a small town atmosphere— low crime rate and good education in neighborhood schools."

Living in Prattville only a dozen years, City Council President Dean Argo has seen a remarkable transition. "What had been considered a farm community is far beyond that now. It's a full-blown vibrant city." ■