

# Memphis Business Journal

Friday, October 30, 2009

## Tunica revs up search for industry

Car plant announcement doesn't slow down recruiting

Memphis Business Journal - by [Michael Sheffield](#)

When Tunica County started construction on its 2,221-acre Metro Mega Site last year, the county was looking for a large industrial client in the market for a "shovel ready" space.

After upstart car manufacturing **GreenTech Automotive, Inc.**, announced its intention this month to build a \$1 billion hybrid automotive facility on 1,500 acres at the site, the county's economic development strategy looked like it might be paying off earlier than expected. But Lyn Arnold, executive director of the **Tunica County Chamber of Commerce**, says Tunica's efforts to attract more manufacturers are continuing to move forward.

In addition to the Mega Site, Arnold says there are plans to develop a 200-acre industrial park near the Tunica Airport. Another 1,000 acres near the Highway 61/Interstate 69 split could be developed into industrial space as well.

Tunica is also courting warehousing and distribution clients and some energy projects, but hasn't gotten to the negotiation phase.

And despite the potential of GreenTech's plans, which at present are still uncertain, Arnold says Tunica County is not slowing down its courtship of potential businesses nor its planning for further industrial expansion.

"We want to diversify past gaming and agriculture and we're prepared and capable of doing multiple projects," Arnold says. "We're happy to accept that challenge because we've got plenty of property."

The site, which was designed by **Allen & Hoshall**, includes connections for utilities and may eventually include a speculative building to show potential investors what their facilities could look like.

The county has an option on the land and any company looking to build on the site would have to buy the land, says Clifton Johnson, Tunica County administrator.

Arnold says the area has come a long way from where it was a few years ago, when it had 15 acres of industrial property and I-69 was just a planned project. She says Tunica became more competitive in the industrial arena when I-69 opened in 2006. Since then, the city has been unsuccessful in luring new industry until being connected with GreenTech through the Mississippi Development Authority in June 2008. The company had looked at six other states, but brought its engineers to the area in August 2008 and committed to the area. Due diligence on the project was interrupted by a lawsuit between GreenTech's founders, Yung Yeung and Xiaolin Wang, that was settled in July.

Wang is moving forward on the project with GreenTech, and the company expects to start construction next spring, with a target opening date of 2012, says Gary Tang, COO of GreenTech.

Once it gets under way, the project could create up to 2,000 construction jobs; GreenTech is anticipating hiring 1,500 workers initially. Parts suppliers could create up to 400 more jobs in the area, and Arnold says the ultimate impact of the project could be the creation of 6,000 jobs when the plant is open.

In West Point, Ga., which is the home of a \$1 billion Kia plant that opened in 2006 and employs around 2,500 people, a small rural town has become a "hub of manufacturing," says Heidi Green, deputy commissioner of global commerce for the state of Georgia.

Kia, a Korean car manufacturer, didn't have a major presence in the U.S. before it built the West Point plant, and it saw record sales in the last year. Green says the plant had 99% support from the surrounding communities and will eventually create around 20,000 jobs in a nine-county region in western Georgia. Unlike Tunica, the site of the Kia plant was owned by multiple landowners, but they were willing to give up land for the plant.

"They were able to see what Kia could mean to the city now and in the future," Green says. "We were lucky to have a successful formula to attract them here."



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Clifton Johnson and Lyn Arnold are leading Tunica County's economic development efforts.

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In Tunica, Arnold says the city and state are working out incentives for GreenTech, which will most likely take the shape of tax rebates once the company meets yet-to-be-determined benchmarks. Tunica isn't setting "absolute deadlines" for the project, but as long as there's an open line of communication and due diligence continues to move along steadily, the project will continue to be supported.

"We've seen their production facilities in China and the engineering of their cars at those facilities," Arnold says. "They've done all the right things so far."

While GreenTech represents the first manufacturing "get" for Tunica, Arnold says the county is well aware of public perception of big announcements and ideas in Tunica. Since 2003, Tunica has been the proposed site of two new casinos (Solid Gold and Myriad) and a motorsports track. Solid Gold never got off the ground and Myriad is on life support, while the race track, after much-hyped initial publicity, faded away.

Arnold says the challenge Tunica faces is straddling the line between being receptive to ideas and throwing support behind private individuals who announce their deals before they have financing or land in place. GreenTech is still working with investors, but it also has official county support behind its project, even if the lawsuit forced the announcement to be made sooner than anticipated.

"Economic development people don't talk about projects until they get it done because you don't want to see it not happen," Arnold says. "We can't help what private individuals stand up and say they're going to do, though."

Projects like Myriad had investors in place, she says, but once the economy began its decline, investors disappeared.

Johnson says even if the county doesn't officially support every project that's announced, it doesn't want to completely turn them away either.

"It's prudent for any organization to listen to people, but we tend to get bashed for announcements that haven't happened," Johnson says. "How long have you heard about The Pyramid or the fairgrounds (in Memphis)? People here got laughed at when (Tunica's first casino) Splash was announced, but if it comes together, it can be a great thing."

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