

Out and About

Nightlife in Alabama taking center spotlight

Alabama restaurant ranked fifth in the nation

Birmingham's Highlands Bar and Grill has been ranked number five in the nation by Gourmet magazine. The October 2001 issue lauded chef Frank Stitt, calling his cooking "all-American and extremely French, as if Alabama were somehow sandwiched between Mississippi and Provence."

The top five restaurants are: Chez Panisse, Berkeley, Calif.; Jean Georges, New York City; The French Laundry, Yountville, Calif; Spago Beverly Hills, Los Angeles; and Highlands Bar and Grill, Birmingham, Ala.

Huntsville plans entertainment district

Thanks to a Huntsville businessman, Huntsville has a \$10 million entertainment district in its future. The district, "Electric Avenue," will feature 11 restaurants and clubs

with options ranging from fine dining to a martini bar and a karaoke club. The block-long development will include more than 24,000 square feet of restaurants and retail spaces as well as condos and a site for a future high-rise hotel. The first phase is scheduled to open in late 2002 on a portion of the city-owned parking deck facing the convention center. Developer Jim Hudson, a Huntsville native and founder of Research Genetics, one of the leading producers of synthetic DNA, says the goal behind the development is to attract more meetings and conventions to downtown Huntsville.

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Allstate locates in Birmingham

Insurance giant Allstate recently announced that Birmingham will be the site for a regional customer service center that will employ 300. The company will locate in Meadow Brook South, located off of U.S. 280.

"Allstate chose Birmingham to locate our new office because we were enticed by the available labor market, the quality of living we can offer our employees and were also impressed by current and potential growth of the Birmingham area," said Allstate spokeswoman Nancy Lemke.

"Alabama made the short list early on," said Angela Wier, director, international development, for EDPA. "We had some great teamwork."

Consulting group CB Richard Ellis brought the project to Alabama where a team including EDPA, the Metropolitan Development Board of Birmingham, Alabama Industrial Development Training and the Alabama Development Office worked together to land

the project.

The service center will serve Allstate customers in the Central Time Zone. Alabama competed with other sites in the same time zone for the project.

One key to winning the project was an office park developed by Daniel Corp. Buildings in the office park feature large open spaces with 50 percent more parking spaces per square foot than most suburban office buildings.

The Allstate Corporation is the nation's largest publicly held personal lines insurer. Allstate provides insurance products to more than 14 million households and has approximately 13,000 exclusive agents in the U.S. and Canada. Awards received include *American Benefactor* 25 Most Generous Companies, *Fortune* Most Admired Companies and *Fortune* Best 100 Companies for Asians, Blacks & Hispanics.

Cingular adding jobs in Birmingham

Another company recently announced it will add call center jobs in the Birmingham area. Cingular Wireless, which operates a regional call center in Hoover, will create between 250 and 300 jobs as it consolidates smaller call center operations from other states. Cingular had earlier announced layoffs at its Birmingham office, but officials say that there will be

a net gain of employment in the area when all of the changes are completed.

Decatur firms expand

There's been a lot of good news for Decatur this month with the announcements of expansions at Eaton Corporation and Monarch Steel.

Eaton Corporation announced that it will relocate additional production to its Decatur facility, creating 30-50 additional jobs. The relocation is part of a consolida-

tion of hydraulic cylinder manufacturing from a plant in Rockford, Ill., which will be closed.

The Decatur plant manufactures hydraulic and pneumatic actuators for industries such as primary metals, waste recycling, offshore oil exploration, amusement parks, paper, automotive and others.

Monarch Steel will invest nearly \$500,000 in a 20,000 square-foot expansion at its processing plant on Red Hat Road. It is also adding five employees.

No employment woes for Benz

Newspaper reports from Mississippi are citing lower than expected application numbers for the Nissan plant being built in that state. Mercedes-Benz officials here in Alabama haven't seen any of that. Eleven thousand people - friends and family of current employees - applied for the 2,000 jobs being created by MBUSI's \$600 million expansion. That was before the application process officially began.

MBUSI recently held their annual "State of the Business" conference for area business and community leaders, during which they discussed the expansion. The new 1.8 million square foot building will house a body shop, paint shop and general assembly line. When completed in late 2003, the expansion will bring U.S. production of the M-Class to 160,000 units annually.

Electronics firm home-grown in Arab

The IEC Electronics building in Arab has a new lease on life with a new home-grown electronics firm as its new tenant. Current Circuits, a fledgling contract electronics company, has leased half of the building and plans to buy it within a year. There are now 28 employees, but founder Tim Sullivan expects to employ 100 people by year's end and 400 within three years. The company, which has already secured several contracts, will produce circuit boards for medical instruments, industrial controls, telecommunications and defense. It also offers engineering, design and prototype production of boards.

Shaw expanding in Andalusia

Shaw Industries is expanding in Andalusia with a \$3 million investment and the addition of 40 jobs. Shaw Industries Inc., headquartered in Dalton, Ga., is the largest manufacturer of tufted broadloom carpet. The investment will purchase additional yarn twisting and heat setting machinery and will increase the facility's yarn processing capacity.

Demopolis celebrates new spec building

The Demopolis Industrial Development Board recently celebrated the completion of its spec building, located in South Industrial Park. The 41,250 square-foot facility is located on a 3.67-acre site, with layout for 110 parking spaces and four truck bays. The building is 100% expandable, has 24' eaves and is capable of handling a 10-ton crane. The site is also expandable. All utilities (electrical, water, sewer, and gas) are located in the park.

Transportation serving the area includes highways 80 and 43; rail service by Burlington Northern and Norfolk Southern; and water transportation via the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, Black Warrior River and Tombigbee River.

For information on the building, contact Kathryn Leverett at the Demopolis Chamber, dacc@westal.net or (334) 289-0270.

Portion of Corridor V opened

Twenty miles of Corridor V, a highway crossing north Alabama, were opened recently during a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Corridor V runs from Interstate 55 at Batesville, Miss., to Interstate 24 at South Pittsburgh, Tenn. Over 150 miles of the road, built to interstate specifications, stretches through Alabama.

"A completed Corridor V will provide a catalyst for attracting businesses with high-tech and high-quality jobs to North Alabama," said Governor Don Siegelman during the ceremony.

There are 26 miles left to be completed in the corridor.

Want your news in developments?

Do you have news that you would like to have considered for inclusion in *Developments*? Send it via one of the three methods below to the attention of Wendy Wallace:

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Southeast top region for plant location

A June survey conducted by the Manufacturers Alliance/MAPI, an Arlington, Va.-based manufacturing research group, shows that the Southeastern United States is the favored location for new U.S. plants, with 50% of respondents favoring this region. Within the geographic regions most of the expansions locate in medium-sized towns and small rural communities. The top five factors in these location decisions are:

1. Labor costs and quality
2. Proximity to customers
3. Government incentives
4. Transportation infrastructure
5. Regulatory/business climate

The results of the study appeared in the August 13 issue of *Industry Week* magazine.

SAE SAMC rescheduled

The Society of Automotive Engineers Southern Automotive Manufacturing Conference, which was originally scheduled for early October in Greenville, S.C., has been rescheduled for April 8-10, 2002.

SAE, along with host company BMW Manufacturing Corp., made the decision to postpone the conference following the Sept. 11 tragic national events.

The professional development seminars scheduled in conjunction with the SAMC will still be held Oct. 8-10 at the Hyatt Regency in Greenville. The rescheduled April conference will be held at the Palmetto Expo Center

in Greenville.

For further information, please visit:

www.sae.org/calendar/sam/index.htm
or www.bmwusfactory.com/main.htm.

Alabama and its cities rank high for logistics

Mobile and Birmingham both rank in the top 20 of *Expansion Management* magazine's "The 100 Most Logistics Friendly Cities." The study, which appeared in the September 2001 issue, also ranked the state as the tenth-best state for logistics overall and the ninth for road conditions. Alabama cities also claimed half of the top ten cities with the most roadway miles per 1,000 population. Anniston, Florence, Dothan, Gadsden and Decatur all appeared in this ranking.

The study focused on the transportation infrastructure of the 328 Metropolitan Statistical Areas and Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas in those areas important to supporting a manufacturing and distribution facility.

UA, Auburn in top 50

The University of Alabama and Auburn University rank in the top 50 of U.S. News & World Report's annual rankings of the country's best public colleges and universities. Auburn ranked 44th, appearing in the ranking for the ninth consecutive year. Alabama ranked 49th in its first appearance on the list.

Alabama Structural Biology Consortium Founded

The University of Alabama in Huntsville, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and the University of South Alabama will share a multi-million grant from the National Science Foundation to enhance Alabama's research capabilities in structural biology. The consortium will allow the schools to use their individual strengths to build an infrastructure for one of the nation's premier structural biology programs.

Economic Development Staff Changes

Lolley Steiner was appointed President to the Auburn Chamber of Commerce. Steiner has been serving as the Chamber's interim president since August.

Cam Ward was appointed Director of Economic Development for the City of Alabaster. Ward was previously District Director for Alabama Congressman Spencer Bachus.