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Warren County business featured during Freight Week

Three global manufacturing companies are currently investing more than \$1 billion in new facilities or expansions in different parts of the St. Louis region, and another \$1.2 billion investment is planned on the downtown St. Louis Riverfront, a clear sign of positive momentum for the bi-state area. Representatives of the companies responsible for these investments were featured panelists during FreightWeekSTL 2023 and shared details on the myriad factors driving their decisions to invest in the region, providing tremendous insight to help continue this growth trend.

The panel discussion highlighted plans by Good Developments Group to develop Gateway South directly adjacent to the Gateway Arch, anchored by a design and construction innovation district driven by prefabricated modular manufacturing; American Foods Group's new beef processing plant in Warren County, Mo.; James Hardie Industries' first Missouri facility coming to Jefferson County, and Tyson Foods plant expansion underway in Caseyville, Ill.

Alec Jadacki, Partner with Good Developments Group, kicked things off with an overview of the Gateway South Development, to be located on approximately 100 acres directly south of the Gateway Arch on a site known as Chouteau's Landing. Jadacki said the development will be parsed out into three separate sub-districts, with the main one being the Design and Construction Innovation District. Another component will involve recreation and residential, mixing in green space, sports courts, and a skatepark with the goal of driving foot traffic which contributes to a safer environment. The final piece will be an entertainment district focused on food and beverage as well as construction themed entertainment tenants.

"But the main idea," Jadacki said, "is trying to co-locate some advanced modular manufacturers. When you think E S G, this is kind of the future in reducing carbon [emissions] and speeding up the process. The Empire State Building, Chrysler Building, these took about a year to construct, but more recently, the Freedom Tower, it took about seven years, so we're kind of going backwards. Construction is 15% of the world's G.D.P so, obviously something needs to change or there needs to be some advances in the technology. And when we're talking modular now -- and the next generation of it, picture a Lego block. Essentially, they're building these blocks onsite, co-located with their suppliers, soup to nuts. So, it's literally an entire apartment, live ready, bathroom, kitchen, wall panels, flooring that'll get brought to a construction site and

dropped on top of a podium, ultimately creating the final structure."

He said they have unbelievable local partners who plan to co-locate at Gateway South, including universities, trade schools, accelerators, incubators and nonprofits. "The idea is really to create a center of excellence. Silicon Valley is the tech hub of the country, and we want Missouri, and specifically St. Louis, to be the construction capital of the country."

Their plan for the site also includes repurposing some of the existing buildings that have long been abandoned and leveraging the infrastructure running through the site with the goal of bringing what was once a thriving riverfront industrial site back to life.

"One of our investors came up with a term that we've adopted and love: 'multimodal heaven.' We have direct access to the road, river and rail. So there's obviously major efficiencies and synergies that can be gained if everything is planned correctly ahead of time," said Jadacki. "Working with the various rail companies, St. Louis Port Authority, and the St. Louis Regional Freightway, we have high hopes for utilizing all three modes of shipping in the future. If you really think about it, there's not really a place in the country or maybe even the world where you could set up all three shipping channels within a stone's throw. So, that was the major draw for us."

Scott Willert, CTP, President of America's Service Line, LLC/America's Logistics, provided an update on American Foods Group's \$800 million beef processing facility under construction since last fall in Warren County, Mo. The company plans to employ 1,300 workers with a good starting wage and compensation package and expects the overall regional impact of the plant to be about one billion dollars.

"As we went through the project and evaluated where we wanted to be and what might be the optimal location for us, we started out by just looking at every county, literally, in the continental U.S., over 3,000 counties," said Willert. "And we eventually narrowed it down to 25, then 10, then three, and eventually landed on Warren County. And we just felt that the infrastructure, natural resources, workforce, the cattle inventory, and Interstate 70 (I-70) played nice contributing factors to that selection. We're excited about the location. It's really at the crossroads of the U.S."

Willert talked about how being located on I-70 was particularly appealing as it will deliver a host of great advantages, starting with how easy it will be for their labor pool to get to work and in-

cluding driver availability along that corridor and the potential for attracting other hungry trucking companies interested in partnering with American Foods Group.

Sean Parks is Senior Capacity Manager for James Hardie Building Products, which will build a 1.25 million square foot facility in Crystal City, Missouri, near Interstate 55, bringing new

jobs with competitive pay and benefits to that part of the region. When evaluating potential site locations, Parks said proximity to raw materials was very important.

"The location we chose is within 60 miles of nine million tons of cement capacity and also adjacent to a silicon mine, which ultimately results in a significant impact to the economic prosperity of the local businesses and reduces inbound transportation costs," said Parks. He added they also needed flat land with direct access to rail and close to interstates and highlighted that access to a good labor force is critical for James Hardie Building Products.

"Our research told us that there's a robust labor market in and around Jefferson County," Parks said. "Finally, the incentives and commitment from the local, state and federal government agencies helped us ultimately choose Missouri. Our experience with working with the government officials in Missouri has been nothing but positive."

Tyson Foods has invested a total of \$228 million in the expansion of its operations in Caseyville, Ill., which is set to be completed toward the end of this year. According to Christopher Rogers, Plant Manager for Tyson Food's Prepared Foods Division, that \$228 million is on top of \$48 million that the company had already invested in the site in the past four years.

"The plan is to add 270,000 square feet to the existing facility to increase our automated warehousing and robotics capabilities," said Rogers. "A great example of this being the AGVs or automatic guided vehicles that will take over material handling, and the ASR or automatic storage and retrieval system that will be utilized for warehousing of ingredients and finished goods. By the expansion's completion, approximately 400 new team members will work across seven new state-of-the-art production lines in addition to the existing four production lines we've installed over the past four years."

Rogers shared Tyson Foods expects about 250 team members to start work across the new lines in the September and October 2023 time period, while 150 more workers are expected to begin work across another three

new lines by June 2024. These are all technical roles such as automation technicians, machine operators, reliability technicians, forklift operators, and food safety and quality assurance technicians, some entry-level production roles, as well as management roles across food safety, quality and assurance, production warehousing and maintenance.

For Tyson Foods, location and workforce were two of the driving factors behind its decision to invest in expanding the Caseyville facility. “We’re strategically located in the central part of the country so that helps us meet the needs of our customers more efficiently, particularly with the latest robotics and automation,” Rogers said. “There’s a strong community base here with an appetite for job opportunities. And our facility is an excellent place for those individuals to work and have a rewarding career and provide for their families.”

He said state and local incentives demonstrated a strong desire to bring permanent jobs to Southwestern Illinois and complimented the commitment from the region for workforce development. He was particularly impressed by the collaboration between local high schools and community colleges to invest in the emerging workforce and build the workforce of the future, tailoring program curriculum to local business needs.

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