



Northrop Grumman image

Paris: Mississippi, partners make splash

If getting noticed is one of the more important things a group can do at the Paris Air Show, then Mississippi and its partners appear to have pulled it off...

The story in the *Seattle Times* captured an important difference between a region hungry for business and one that's been an aerospace giant for years. Above a story about Alabama's "glamorous" reception at the Eiffel Tower was this headline:

"Alabama outdoes Washington in Air Show hoopla."

The story also said Alabama not only had 100 representatives at the Paris Air

Show, but had teamed up with Mississippi and Florida to promote the region as a good place for aerospace companies. And aerospace powerhouse Washington? It had a dozen people, twice what it had had in the past.

But there was more. A delegate from Washington, whose company designs fixtures that hold aerospace structures in place during manufacturing, was approached by delegates from Mississippi. They told him about the incentives his

company would get if it opened a facility in Mississippi.

Call it hunger. Call it nerve. Call it chutzpah. It was noticed, certainly by Washington's largest newspaper.

If being noticed is one of the most important things you can do at the Paris Air Show, then this region pulled it off. The show, held every other year, is designed to let aerospace companies show off their products to military and commercial markets. It attracts thousands of exhibitors, corporate leaders, politicians and press from around the world. It's also a chance for economic development groups to strut their stuff on a



Google image/Tcp illustration

Alabama, Florida and Mississippi each have several aerospace clusters.

world stage and to make contacts and build relationships that will pay off down the road.

This region for the past few years has received a lot of publicity, thanks in part to the ongoing battle between Boeing and Northrop/EADS over the Air Force tanker. With world eyes already focused on that project, the three states and aerospace regions within those states are striking while the fire is hot.

The idea is to grab attention, and that they did. In addition to the sunset gala at the Eiffel Tower, representatives of Mobile, South Mississippi and Northwest Florida co-hosted an afternoon cruise on the Seine River for more than 300 guests.

All this sparkle has a purpose.

George Freeland, executive director of the Jackson County Economic Development Foundation, said his county is part of a team that's a world player in aerospace.

"South Mississippi is very much in the international spotlight. It has earned in recent years a level of respect and recognition on the international stage," said Freeland, whose county builds por-

tions of the Northrop Grumman Global Hawk and Fire Scout UAVs.

"People are beginning to recognize us," said Larry Barnett, executive director of the Harrison County Development Commission, whose county is a major center for Air Force electronics training. He said one company executive told him South Mississippi is doing the right thing. "This is a long-term effort of building relationship."

To understand the significance of being noticed in Paris, it's important to understand the subtext of the battle over the tanker project.

Regional battle

The competition between Boeing and the Northrop Grumman/EADS team over the \$40 billion Air Force tanker project has evolved into a match between Everett, Wash., and Mobile, Ala., over jobs.

Washington, long a dominant player in the aerospace field, sees the project as pitting an American company and American jobs against a European company and an upstart region with no track record of building aircraft. Ala-

bama and the Gulf Coast region see the project as a chance to develop a major, international center for aircraft manufacturing. The regional sniping has been ugly at times.

The Gulf Coast region recognized early on what was at stake with the tanker project. The experience with Mercedes showed them that the right project at the right time can have a dramatic impact. The air shows provides the region and their respective states and annual public relations opportunity.

Washington has been a bit slower to react, perhaps in part because the West Coast has been an aerospace giant for so long. California in 2007 had 118,532 aerospace employees and Washington had 81,932. Washington's total alone is greater than the combined total of 59,660 for Alabama, Florida and Mississippi. But that casual attitude appears to be changing.

Washington is concerned enough that it recently formed the Washington Aerospace Partnership. According to an opinion piece by Connie Niva, a Port of Everett commissioner, the partnership is a "coordinated approach to create a

manufacturing environment that is even more attractive to the aerospace industry. ... We are going to aggressively market our region to make sure the Pentagon knows that Washington is the premier place in the world to build airplanes." She also wrote the plan is to work with California, Texas, Illinois and Kansas, all with stakes in the tanker.

What Washington faces is a competitor with many players, each with its own agenda. Within Alabama, Florida and Mississippi there are multiple subregions, each trying to land aerospace operations and projects in their own back yard.

In Alabama, the big boy in aerospace is Huntsville, home of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and Army missile activities. In Florida, aerospace operations are spread throughout the state, but the largest region is Central Florida, home of Kennedy Space Center. And in Mississippi, the key regions are in Starkville around Mississippi State University, and the along the Gulf Coast.

While they each have their own agenda, the mindset they take to an event like Paris is, get a prospect interested in looking at the Southeast region first, then get them interested in your state or your particular neck of the woods. For delegation from South Mississippi, that means the roughly 300-mile long Gulf Coast aerospace corridor.

Gulf Coast corridor

What makes up the Gulf Coast aerospace corridor depends on who you ask. There's general agreement it includes South Mississippi, South Alabama and Northwest Florida. But how far into Florida? Some think Tallahassee, others see Tyndall Air Force Base in Bay County. To the west, some take it to New Orleans, home of Michoud Assembly Facility and the National Center for Advanced Manufacturing.

There are at least four aerospace Web sites about the Gulf Coast. In Northwest Florida the *Gulf Coast Aerospace & Defense Coalition* site promotes three counties in the Panhandle and in Mobile the *Keep Our Tanker* site is designed

to show support for Northrop Grumman and EADS' bid to win the tanker contract. In South Mississippi the *Mississippi Gulf Coast Aerospace Corridor* site provides news and data about aerospace activities in South Mississippi, while the *Gulf Coast Aerospace Corridor* site does the same for the region between New Orleans and Panama City, Fla.

There are other players as well with an interest in the Gulf Coast aerospace region. The Stennis-Michoud Aerospace Corridor Alliance was organized by U.S. Sen. David Vitter and economic development groups from Louisiana and Mississippi. They are exploring ways to promote that part of the Gulf Coast. And Florida's Great Northwest, a group created by landowner St. Joe, promotes a 16-county region of Northwest Florida for aerospace and other industrial sectors. It organized a group of 23 people to attend the air show.

It can be confusing, but Barnett said regional cooperation is growing and the wave of the future. For South Missis-

"The reason we work regionally is it's good for all of us."

Larry Barnett
Harrison County
Development Commission

issippi, ties have been the strongest with areas to the east, in part because of the tanker project. But he's also a member of the Stennis-Michoud group, and wants to strengthen ties to the west and leverage that area's focus on space.

"The reason we work regionally is it's good for all of us," said Barnett. He points out that if Stennis Space Center and the area around that NASA complex grows, it's good for Harrison County because many people from its county will end up working there.

South Mississippi

South Mississippi as a partner with other areas brings a lot to the table. It has aerospace activities in rocket propulsion, satellite subsystems, geospatial technologies, advanced materials, electronics systems and unmanned aerial

Region's aerospace jobs, 2007	
State	Employment
Florida	32,366
Alabama	13,723
Mississippi	13,571
Louisiana	9,654
Largest aerospace jobs, 2007	
California	118,532
Washington	81,932
Virginia	81,430
Texas	55,069
Kansas	42,122
<i>Source: Aerospace Industries Association</i>	

systems, and by extension, aircraft manufacturing. Just last month the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg entered an agreement with GE Aviation to provide research in the use of composites in aircraft engines, adding yet one more activity to the mix.

Although Jackson County's future is clearly tied to the growing field of unmanned aerial systems, for that county a more immediate interest is the competition between Boeing and Northrop over the tanker.

Should EADS win and set up an assembly plant at Mobile's Brookley Industrial Complex, it would have a long-term impact on his county.

"There's just no denying that the hot deal, the hot prospects right now are those companies associated with the tanker program," said Freeland.

"Several of my discussions in Paris were with companies that are more or less household names, and the talks centered around the tanker project and the supplier relationships they anticipate having with the program," Freeland said. The center where Northrop builds part of the Fire Scout and Global Hawk is less than 35 miles from where EADS wants to assemble tankers.

For Barnett, his county's central location is crucial. He sees Harrison County playing a crucial role because it's a major population center with the second largest city and the state.

Harrison County is a transportation hub, with both the Mississippi State Port at Gulfport and Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport. It's also a financial center and education center, and where several companies work with composites, a material of growing interest to the aviation industry.

Getting to work

But aside from the public relations work, there's also the very tiring job of meeting with prospects and talking about the benefits of setting up operations in South Mississippi.

Last year in Farnborough the South Mississippi representatives felt they needed two representatives at each meeting. But in Paris they split the meetings between the three of them so they could cover more ground. They met with 36 companies in three days.

"It's grueling," said Barnett, who said he met with four or five companies each day, and his teammates did the same. "We were all over the place."

And that's something that would not be possible in a venue other than the air show. Paris and the Farnborough are the once-a-year opportunity to meet companies that are based throughout the world. If they were to try to meet the same companies individually on their home turf, it would be cost prohibitive – assuming they could get appointments.

"Shows like this bring a tremendous measure of efficiency and cost effectiveness," said Freeland. "We cover a lot of ground when we're there."

Barnett said they met with companies based in Europe as well as those from the United States with operations nationwide, from New York to California and Washington state. Some companies are involved in commercial aviation, including private jets, some in defense. The list included those that build complete aircraft and those that are suppliers. There were also professional services companies and engineering companies "that have a desire to have a presence here," said Freeland.

Freeland said several companies they met have ongoing relationships with

Stennis Space Center. And there were also a number of companies that expect to be suppliers for the KC-45 tanker.

The waiting game

While economic development professionals would like to come away from Paris with some firm commitments, they see it as opportunities to get their areas known. And in a global economy, it's particularly difficult to have your voice heard.

Arnie Williams of Mississippi Power, one of the three-member team from South Mississippi, said he was impressed that his two travel companions were remembered by so many company officials.

"Walking in on appointments with these guys and seeing them remembered from years past," Williams said, "it just speaks a lot of the due diligence, calling on a consistent basis."

Barnett said it's like any investment. "The results don't always come about quickly," Barnett said.

Ensuring prospects know about what South Mississippi has to offer is their most important task.

"We have a viable corridor that includes NASA facilities, propulsion test operations, and in the case of Jackson County, ever-growing participation in the world of unmanned aerial vehicles," Freeland said.

"We have the inventory, we have the assets and we have the capability to continue to expand," he said.

"Through our long-term efforts we expect to grow this corridor," said Barnett. And that is something he believes will help raise the income levels of South Mississippi.

"The reason we go after science and technology type jobs is that they are higher paying jobs, whether it's on the professional level of engineer or the manufacturing side," Barnett said.

"All that gets back to the main purpose of being in economic development: to increase the wealth of our citizens," he said.

- David Tortorano



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