

Anniston-Oxford

National defense-related work at the Anniston Army Depot and its local contractors helped support the economy of the Anniston-Oxford metro area during 2008. Store openings at Oxford Exchange boosted retail trade employment, while professional and business and other services saw modest job gains. Nonagricultural employment rose by 100 between October 2007 and October 2008, despite the loss of 300 manufacturing jobs. With the local economy faring relatively well in the current downturn, the Anniston-Oxford metro saw its labor force grow by almost 300 during this period. Still, some residents commute outside the area to work and total employment fell by about 1,170, pushing the unemployment rate from 3.3 percent in October 2007 to 5.9 percent in October 2008.

Fifteen new and expanding industries promised 1,136 jobs with investment of almost \$50.5 million in 2007. The area added to its auto suppliers with vehicle component manufacturer Imperial Group investing \$5.5 million in a plant projected to employ 178. North American Bus Industries was putting \$13 million into an expansion that could boost employment by 350, while a \$12.4 million addition at Doncasters Southern Tool will create 124 jobs. The Kronospan wood panel and laminate flooring manufacturing plant was in operation around the clock by early April 2008, adding to its workforce of about 100 employees with wages advertised at \$16 to \$21 per hour. Kronospan, which broke ground in 2005, should reach employment of 650 to 700 by 2015.

Defense contractors partnering with the Depot saw their business grow in 2007 and throughout most of 2008. BAE Systems completed a \$7 million expansion and added 100 jobs in 2007. The company received a number of sizeable federal contracts in 2008 for their work refurbishing and upgrading military vehicles. Expansion at the BAE plant added manufacturing space, three presses to the forge facility, and brought the Anniston workforce to more than 1,000. However, contracts began to wind down late in 2008 and BAE announced planned layoffs of 78 employees by year-end and around 150 more by the end of March 2009. General Dynamics Land Systems, which added 220 employees with investment of \$2.6 million in 2007, received a 2008 contract to build additional Cougar troop transport vehicles for the military and continued its repair, assembly, and upgrade work on the M1 family of vehicles.

FabArc Steel Supply in Oxford landed a sizeable contract for work on the ThyssenKrupp plant in Mobile and purchased land for possible future expansion. But the Anniston-Oxford metro area lost manufacturing jobs in 2008, including 325 at Springs Global and 69 at Advanced Federal due to plant closings and 45 as a result of layoffs at Ameron. Tyson Foods closed its Oxford transportation center in November, idling 33. The Honda plant in nearby Talladega County, which employs a number of workers from the Anniston-Oxford area, scaled back vehicle production for 2008 and into 2009, but maintained its workforce in preparation for adding production of the Ridgeline pickup and Accord V-6 sedan in 2009.

Several projects underway in 2008 should facilitate development of McClellan, which is impeded by environmental issues, as well as limited sewer capacity and road access. Funding for a \$26 million wastewater treatment plant for the Anniston Army Depot was

approved early in the year—a first step in a project to build the Cane Creek treatment plant that would service an area along U.S. 431 and McClellan. Funding is available for a spring 2009 start on Phase One of the road that will connect AL 21 to the Eastern Parkway; when complete, the road will improve interstate access to the former fort. Management issues developed during the year when a judge ruled that the Joint Powers Authority that governed McClellan was not a legal entity and transferred control to the Calhoun County Commission. The Commission began receiving payments from the Army's \$200 million clean-up fund late in the year and was working on establishing a joint development board with the city of Anniston.

FEMA signed a new five-year lease for three McClellan buildings early in 2008. The Center for Domestic Preparedness continues to expand its training—the number of first responders going through the program has grown from 2,500 in 2000 to a projected 75,000 in 2008. Healthcare options in the Anniston-Oxford metro area grew during the year, with Regional Medical Center opening an interventional vascular lab and Stringfellow Hospital finishing its Wound Care Center. A new pediatric center completed in May will help area children with health problems. Intellimed Solutions continued work on transforming McClellan's former PX into McClellan Park Medical Mall; the first practices opened there in September and ground was broken for a cancer center. The project will include a café, wireless internet, food court, and shops. A local dentist is moving his practice into the former Welcome Center at McClellan. In Jacksonville the RevPlex medical complex opened and construction got underway on Ladiga Manor, an assisted living center that will provide 42 units when the first phase is completed in March 2009.

Oxford Exchange welcomed retailers Dress Barn and Kohl's in 2008. However, Circuit City planned to close its Anniston store by year-end. Other retail development focused on area downtowns: furniture store Keepers and Still Mid-Town Ceramics were among businesses opening in Anniston, while Oxford promoted a campaign to attract people to its downtown. Jacksonville continued work on a streetscape project in its downtown square; Walgreen's announced plans to locate nearby. And a Hampton Inn in Jacksonville that will include a conference center was approved.

A one cent sales tax for Calhoun County effective January 1, 2009 is expected to generate about \$12 million for local schools; the city of Oxford approved an additional one cent levy to help fund capital improvement projects, including a \$20 million building and a \$6.15 million Freshman Academy at Oxford High. Jacksonville worked on an expansion of its high school, with a mini-gym ready in fall 2008 and classrooms targeted for year-end. Jacksonville State University trustees approved a football stadium expansion and a 390-bed dormitory and decided to seek a \$10 million bank-qualified bond in December to get construction underway and then market the needed \$65 million bond issue in spring 2009. A cost-sharing agreement was reached with the city on a related sewer project.

Recreation projects that should boost area tourism were completed during 2008 including: the Pinhoti Trail that joins into the Appalachian Trail, the Alabama Scenic River Trail to the Gulf of Mexico, and the Chief Ladiga Trail connecting bikers to Georgia's Silver Comet Trail. The city of Weaver added a BMX track and RC vehicle

track to its multi-phase outdoor facility. Late in the year, Oxford voted to rebid its planned sports complex. And a new Jacksonville Senior Center opened in August.

Per capita income in the Anniston-Oxford area of \$30,401 in 2007 was up 5.7 percent over 2006—the largest increase among the state’s 11 metros. Average wages of \$34,593 ranked 7th. Population growth between 2006 and 2007 was a modest 0.4 percent with about 400 new residents. The area’s housing market fared better than the state’s during the first nine months of 2008, although building permits for single-family homes fell by 29.1 percent and the number of homes sold dropped 18.2 percent. OFHEO reported that house prices rose 2.4 percent from third quarter 2007 to third quarter 2008.