

FEBRUARY 2015 • POWERING YOUR COMMUNITY

# Alabama

## Wiregrass Electric COOPERATIVE

# LIVING



## Grow Dothan

One group's mission to improve the Wiregrass

TOTAL YEAR 3 GOAL **\$2,000,000**

\$1,900,000  
\$1,800,000  
\$1,700,000  
\$1,600,000  
\$1,500,000  
\$1,400,000  
\$1,300,000  
\$1,200,000  
\$1,100,000  
\$1,000,000  
\$900,000  
\$800,000  
\$700,000  
\$600,000  
\$500,000  
\$400,000

YEAR 1 GOAL **\$690,000**

[www.wiregrass.coop](http://www.wiregrass.coop)



#BXNDJGX \*\*\*\*\*AUTO\*\*5-DIGIT 36302  
#0321094831#  
DOTHAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
PO BOX 638  
DOTHAN AL 36302-0638  
PK:87  
P8  
15081



WEC is  
introducing  
**Operation  
Round Up!**

See Page 6 for details

# Grow Dothan group helps spur economic development for the Wiregrass

A longstanding economic development partnership for Dothan and the Wiregrass community has been re-branded with a new name and logo, along with a push for new investments to help the area continue to thrive.

The effort is known as “Grow Dothan,” and it’s a public/private partnership used by the Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce to levy the collective power of business leaders, government and citizens to bring in new businesses while also supporting the existing business community and enhancing the region’s infrastructure.



In 2014, Glasstream Powerboats, a fishing and pleasure boat manufacturing and design company, decided to build their new production facility in Dothan. The facility is expected to bring 175 new jobs to the area.



## How it began

**Mark Saliba** is chairman of Grow Dothan. His late father, former Dothan mayor Alfred Saliba, and others formed the partnership’s precursor “Dothan by Design” in 1994, and over the past 20 years, the partnership has led to \$1 billion in total investments in the region and the creation of 17,000 jobs, as well as \$34 million in infrastructure development, often via state and federal grants, for airport, industrial park, utilities and other enhancements.

After the global recession’s grip began to wane, organizers felt the organization needed to be re-energized and regrouped to meet a new era of economic conditions and challenges.

“(The founders) enhanced the financial support through economic development and bringing the community

together,” says chamber president **Matt Parker**.

“We’re just trying to keep the torch lit, keep the torch burning.”

Led by a group of city- and county-elected officials and chamber board members, the newly named organization kicked off a three-year \$2 million capital campaign in late 2014, with potential impacts from these private donations reaching well beyond Dothan’s boundaries to the remainder of Houston County, as well as Dale, Geneva and Henry counties.

“We have developed our marketing brochures, we have a video we have produced as well,” Saliba says, adding that through personal contacts, emailing, letters and phone calls, he’s confident the fundraising goal will be achieved.

A number of community partners are important to Grow Dothan’s success, Parker says, including local airport officials, Wallace Community College and Troy University; public school systems; the Houston County Industrial Development Authority; local government leaders, including Houston County Commission Chairman Mark Culver, Dothan Mayor Mike Schmitz and their respective commissions; state legislators; the Alabama Department of Commerce; Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT); and others.

“We also work very closely with Wiregrass Electric,” says Parker. “They are essential to helping us meet our goals, and they are always there whenever we need anything from them. They are very responsive to answering any





questions we may have.”

“It’s all collaborative trying to keep everybody updated on what’s needed to work on a particular project,” Parker says.

These projects require not only funding and collaboration, but also patience, as negotiating agreements with industries aren’t typically a speedy process, Parker says.

### Bringing in business

KFH Industries Inc. was convinced to gradually relocate its Miami-based operations to Dothan over five years and since 2010 has manufactured fire hoses from its 150,000-square-foot plant on Columbia Highway.

And in spring 2013, Commercial Jet Services LLC announced intentions to open a new 400,000-square-foot facility at Dothan Regional Airport in Dale County. Parker says over many months, utility partners, consultants, municipalities and company officials and other parties ironed out the details for Commercial Jet Services to take over the space formerly occupied by Pemco World Air Services, which had filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy protection about a year before.

Commercial Jet Services provides aviation services including overhaul, maintenance and repair.

Parker says it took about a year of groundwork for local officials to bring fishing and pleasure boat manufacturing and design company Glasstream™ Powerboats to Dothan, and during the process, the company went through two consultants with different preferences and priorities to accommodate. In spring 2014, the company announced it would open a manufacturing facility in Dothan.

And Grow Dothan’s support doesn’t end when a company opens its doors.

Once Commercial Jet Services opened, a need emerged for more structural sheet metal workers. To work to fill that gap, Parker says the chamber as a whole and Grow Dothan partnered with AIDT, Wallace Community College, the aviation community, business and government entities and others to



KFH Industries Inc. is the largest manufacturer of fire hose and related products in the world. They relocated to the Wiregrass in 2010 thanks to the efforts of the Dothan Chamber of Commerce and others.

open CJET — an eight-week academy providing hands-on training for structural sheet metal work like riveting and bending metals.

Grow Dothan provided tooling for the academy, which is available to trainees free of cost, and ensures them work with the company upon graduation. The academy was developed with a goal to graduate 25 to 30 trainees every eight weeks, with the first graduating class finishing in mid-December 2014 and scheduled to start work at CJS in mid-January 2015.

Parker says it’s these types of personal connections and creating of new opportunities in which Grow Dothan wants to continue to play a role. “You’re trying to cultivate careers,” he says.

### Planning ahead

Moving forward, Grow Dothan has identified certain industry target sectors as ones with the most potential, and also the types of infrastructure projects that could help bring these types of new manufacturers to the area. These sectors include aviation, warehousing and distribution, fabricated metals, food manufacturing and food processing and some automotive industries, Parker says.

Emphasis on cultivating a stable, growing and adaptable workforce is also being integrated in local school systems and postsecondary education institutions, Parker says.

And to help make industry officials’ decisions to locate here an easier one, it’s also the goal of state and local officials to keep bureaucratic red tape at bay compared to other states’ regulations, he adds.

Existing businesses also receive re-

sources and support from Grow Dothan and its partners.

“One of the things I do like about what we are doing here is working with small businesses. A lot of times there’s a misconception that this is only about the big industries and the big companies, and though they are of large importance to us, it’s also the small businesses. SBs make up a large part of what the chamber is all about,” Saliba says.

But when it comes to bringing in new jobs, Saliba says many communities around the country can offer incentives and infrastructure that appeal to industries. But the Dothan area has another intangible factor in its favor.

“It gets down to the people in the Wiregrass area,” he says. “We are a caring and compassionate people. We try to get along well with one another. There’s a better synergy that goes on with all our entities, whether that’s government entities, business or education. What is our strongest asset? You ask anyone, and invariably they will say it’s the people and community. The people are our best resource.” ■

### See Matt Parker talk about Wiregrass Electric Cooperative

Last year, Parker was interviewed about WEC’s role in economic



development across the Wiregrass. Scan this code to see the interview!