

BUSINESS ADVOCATE

Alabama aircraft maker Airbus has been developing Mobile's rich workforce talent pool through a number of innovative programs and apprenticeships.

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LANDING LOCAL TALENT



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Airbus did not land in Mobile, Alabama, by accident. The global aircraft maker was drawn to Mobile County for a variety of reasons including the strong infrastructure, helpful partnerships and promising workforce.

Critical to a company's decision in establishing a new facility is the availability of infrastructure. Mobile's accessibility to national interstates and highways, large deep-water port, maintained railway, and of course, the long runway at the Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley, all played an integral role in recruiting Airbus to Alabama.

Additionally, the city, county, state, and federal elected leaders offered Airbus unwavering support from the beginning. These government officials stood alongside the company's leadership to welcome Airbus, support its plans nationally and help it succeed in Mobile.

"Airbus is drawn to the supportive, diverse, and vibrant Alabama community in expanding our only U.S. airliner manufacturing operation right here

in Mobile," said Michelle Hurdle, director of economic and community development for Airbus. "This growth is made possible by identifying and developing the skilled workforce in Alabama as we strategize a pipeline to the aerospace industry in our state."

at least 1,000 more team members expected in the next few years.

The State of Alabama continues to beat its own unemployment records, meaning less people than ever are looking for jobs. For Airbus, this means that to nearly double their people, innovative and effective workforce development is essential to attract and retain

"AIRBUS IS DRAWN TO THE SUPPORTIVE, DIVERSE, AND VIBRANT ALABAMA COMMUNITY..."

As one of Mobile's largest employers, Airbus employs over 1,650 people in Mobile County. With the increasing production and expanding footprint, at least 300 additional employees are needed this year, with

workers in Alabama.

To do this, Airbus' strategic community and workforce development team created several pathways for people to join the team. From high school students to experienced professionals, Airbus has strategically developed



programs and initiatives to cultivate a skilled workforce across the state.

FLIGHTPATH9

The FlightPath9 Early Careers program is a partnership with a local Historically Black Community College, Bishop State Community College, for individuals that have graduated high school with 0-4 years of work experience. Airbus worked with Bishop State's dean of curriculum to create an Aviation Manufacturing Short Certificate program, an accredited pre-employment training program into Airbus that also earns students 18 credit hours.

In Summer 2022, 46 students graduated from the program, spending several months in Bishop State classes learning the basics, then spent three months in *Fast Track* classes developed for Airbus by the state's AIDT program, and then 12 months on the shop floor rotating through a variety of workstations.

FlightPath9 is directed by Flights Works Alabama, a partnership between the state and Airbus, to encourage young people to explore careers in aviation and aerospace.



Students learn global competencies for working on aircraft: torqueing, riveting, gauging, reading blueprints (written and digital), how to use tools, ergonomics, and more.

AIRBUS ON BOARD

The company has also created a new program, Airbus On Board, which offers people with five years of work experience in any field a chance to be retrained for aerospace work. This experience is not limited to aviation, and has ranged from childcare to trucking and everything in between. With five years of professional experience under their belt, Airbus On Board participants enter the production line directly once graduating the program and completing the Airbus specific training at AIDT.

FLIGHT LINE APPRENTICESHIP

For their technical apprenticeship program, Airbus has partnered with Coastal Alabama Community College. In Coastal's curriculum, they have an Airframe Powerplant (AMP) course program, and Airbus is specifically interested in those individuals who are certified in the airframe courses. Currently, there are 13 students in this program that began official coursework in May of this year.

These programs all serve as incredibly valuable alternatives to a traditional four-year college degree. As a graduate of the program, students begin employment at Airbus with full benefits, 401k matching, and tuition reimbursement as an option for those that may later develop an area of interest and decide to continue their education. Airbus is a growing company with countless ways to develop career experience and opportunities without completing a typical college to workforce trajectory.

Airbus knows that career planning could begin as early as one's asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The company is proactive in their interactions with students and children to introduce STEM fields at a young age, creating a bookend to the workforce development strategy.

ALABAMA AVIATION EDUCATION CENTER

Through a partnership with the state, Airbus established the Alabama Aviation Education Center,



known as Flight Works Alabama, to host camps, school field trips, tours, and more for Alabama students. The AAEC brings together K-12 students, higher education partners, and business and industry stakeholders to educate and inspire learners of all ages.

WE BUILD IT BETTER

In 2020, Airbus became one of six corporate sponsors for the middle school program entitled, “We Build It Better.” As an industry-driven, educator-written curriculum to introduce STEM and technical skills, it has now been adopted by over 100 Alabama middle schools and in 13 different states. Outside of aviation, “We Build It Better” teaches students about innovation,



invention, design and engineering, in addition to the crucial skills of teamwork and leadership.

WE WILL BUILD IT BETTER

Launching this fall, “We Will Build It Better” is an elementary school-aged curriculum with the same goal of early introduction to these technical tools, skills, and careers. With an emphasis on STEM education and sustainability, this community development program can specifically serve underserved communities by helping to share the endless opportunities and potential for young adults in Alabama.

We Build it Better and We Will

Build it Better are both programs of Flight Works Alabama. These education and development programs are only as successful as they’ve been because Airbus stands out to students and potential employees. With high-tech facilities, modern and updated equipment, this is certainly not the manufacturing of yesteryear. Airbus operates with high standards, and safety continues to be the number one priority across the entire company.

Aviation is a unique and growing industry that offers expansive career options from production to pilots. Airbus focuses on their people as much as the product. Airbus has an unmatched pipeline for developing talent, and as Airbus Director of Economic and Community Development Michelle Hurdle says, “Our people stay because of the people.” **BA**

The Business Advocate is published by the Business Council of Alabama, a non-partisan, statewide business association representing the interests and concerns of nearly 1 million working Alabamians through its member companies and its partnership with the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama. For more information on the Business Council of Alabama please contact us at (800) 665-9647 or visit us online at bcatoday.org.