The Business Council of Alabama (BCA) and The Alabama Technology Network (ATN), in partnership with The Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), presented the prestigious 2013 Alabama Manufacturer of the Year Awards to three outstanding Alabama manufacturing companies: Mercedes-Benz U.S. International (large manufacturer); 3M (medium manufacturer); and GATR Technologies, Inc. (small manufacturer).

The BCA and ATN began the annual awards ceremony in 2000, and the event has consistently drawn Alabama dignitaries and manufacturing leaders to honor companies that have a commitment to improving Alabama’s economy. Governor Robert Bentley presented the keynote address.

The awards program recognizes Alabama manufacturing enterprises that exhibit excellence in leadership, performance, profitability and workforce relations. Winning manufacturers are selected by an independent panel of judges that looks for demonstrations of superior performance in the areas of customer focus, employee commitment, operational excellence, continuous improvement, profitable growth and investment in training and retraining.

“For the 14th time, the BCA is honored to recognize Alabama’s best manufacturers for the valuable role they play in the state’s economy,” said Governor Bentley.
The Manufacturer of the Year Awards began 14 years ago, and they continue to be a highlight of the year not just for the BCA but also for the Alabama Technology Network, the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama, and the National Association of Manufacturers, to which BCA is the exclusive affiliate.

Congratulations to the best manufacturers of 2013.


Bentley lauds manufacturers as key to state job recruiting

Governor Bentley told manufacturing business attendees at the awards luncheon on April 19 that they are a key part of the state’s job continued on page 3.
Manufacturers of the Year continued

recruiting portfolio.

“When I try to sell Alabama I talk about you,” Bentley told the more than 200 guests who attended the MOTY awards at the Renaissance Montgomery Hotel & Spa at the Convention Center. “You are a part of my ability to recruit Alabama.”

Bentley said Alabama’s modern manufacturing resurgence began 20 years ago when Daimler Benz announced it would build its first passenger vehicle assembly plant outside of Germany in Vance, near Tuscaloosa. Mercedes has rolled out 1.7 million vehicles from Vance since production began 15 years ago.

“Twenty years ago when Mercedes decided to come to Vance and Tuscaloosa, it really changed Alabama,” he said. Since Mercedes, other major automobile manufacturers have called Alabama home.

Commercial Jet recently announced it will spend $12 million to open a new, 400,000 square feet facility at Dothan Regional Airport and employ hundreds of people. The company provides air freighter conversion and maintenance, repair, and overhaul services.

Alabama also landed Airbus, the European passenger jet manufacturing company, to Mobile.

Bentley said even though the recession that began in 2008 is still affecting businesses not only in Alabama but nationwide, Alabama is among the top five in recruiting jobs. He said he’s optimistic about the future.

“Once our economy turns around, I really have high hopes for this state,” Bentley said.

Decatur-Austin Robotics Coalition Named Best of the BEST

Students from the Decatur-Austin Robotics Coalition, the Decatur City Schools’ combined robotics program, were recognized for achieving the highest in the 2012 Alabama BEST Robotics competitions. The BEST Robotics Inc. is designed to excite and inspire students about engineering, science and technology careers through participation in a sports-like competition.
Alabama can gain multi-state manufacturing innovation center, UAH director says

Alabama has the opportunity to land one of 15 manufacturing innovation centers that will be created to help reverse the loss of manufacturing jobs to foreign countries, an innovation director at the University of Alabama in Huntsville said.

Dr. William R. Killingsworth, director of the Office for Enterprise Innovation and Sustainability at UAH, told the Business Council of Alabama’s Manufacturing Advocacy Council (MAC) at an April meeting that Alabama is in a good position to land one of 15 regional manufacturing innovation centers to be funded with $1 billion in federal seed money. A pilot center is in Ohio, serving that state, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, Killingsworth said.

The Obama Administration seeks $1 billion to fund 15 regional centers comprising the National Network for Manufacturing Innovation. The partners are the federal departments of Defense, Energy, Commerce’s National Institute of Standard and Technology, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the National Science Foundation.

Killingsworth urged action as innovation center proposals are due this summer. “If we are on the ground floor our small, medium, and large manufacturers are going to have access to it,” said MAC co-chairman Ronnie Boles, of General & Automotive Machine Shop in Huntsville.

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The Business Council of Alabama, the state’s exclusive affiliate to the National As-
Manufacturing Innovation Center continued

The Manufacturing Advocate

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In the 20 years since automaker Daimler AG announced plans to build its first passenger car assembly operation outside of Germany, Mercedes-Benz U.S. International's investment in Alabama will have increased from $300 million in the first production year of 1997 to a projected $4.5 billion by 2015.

MBUSI is the production location for three vehicles for domestic and worldwide export. Alabama-made SUVs represent about 15 percent of the sales of passenger cars for Mercedes-Benz, a division of Daimler AG. Employing 2,800 at its plants near Tuscaloosa, MBUSI currently is undergoing a $2.4-billion expansion to support vehicle model changes, the new C-Class and an entirely new sport utility vehicle.

Last year, MBUSI built a record 180,379 vehicles, bringing the 15-year total to more than 1.7 million Mercedes-Benz vehicles. MBUSI won both the 2013 Motor Trend Sport Utility of the Year award and Europe’s Golden Steering Wheel Award for the 2013 GL-Class. The Mercedes-Benz GL is “an outstanding vehicle,” Motor Trend reported.

MBUSI works to increase safety and reduce its environmental footprint partly by being a 100-percent recycler or energy converter of waste. MBUSI trains current Team Members, and in 2012 cooperated with Shelton State Community College to train its next generation of employees in the Mercedes-Benz Industrial Mechatronics and Automotive Technician program.

MBUSI has contributed more than $10 million toward philanthropic efforts in Alabama, including sporting events that raise money for children, disaster relief, the arts, social welfare, and education.

Mercedes-Benz U.S. International CEO Markus Schaefer (center) accepted the 2013 Large Manufacturer of the Year award on behalf of MBUSI. Donald Keeler, Austal USA vice president of human resources (left), who represented the 2012 Large Manufacturer of the Year Austal USA, and Governor Robert Bentley presented the award.
3M Guin began in 1954 and through 10 expansions has provided jobs for northwest Alabamians who make products used all over the world. With 303 employees, 3M Guin is part of an international company that employs 87,000 people in more than 70 countries.

3M Guin employees make reflective sheeting for commercial and non-critical traffic signs, and pavement-marking tape symbols. 3M Guin is looking to the future. The technical team started a new glass bubble manufacturing process, and 3M Guin worked to introduce a new Wet Reflective Pavement Marking product that is brighter on rainy nights. In addition, plant employees participated in the launch of a new removable tape to enhance the Pavement Marking product portfolio.

3M Guin sells products in all 50 states and most countries. 3M Guin uses technology to improve market performance and trains managers and supervisors using company and local technical school and college resources.

3M Guin also is involved in the community. Its employees serve on city councils, chamber of commerce boards, city and park recreation boards, and volunteer with fire departments, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Habitat for Humanity, and the American Cancer Society Relay for Life. 3M Guin employees have contributed more than $220,000 to United Way, local schools and libraries, and volunteer fire departments. Following the April 2011 tornadoes, 3M Guin employees contributed $35,000 for Marion County Habitat for Humanity rebuilding efforts in Hackleburg that a tornado virtually destroyed.

The plant manager for 3M’s Guin facility, Rod Northam (center), accepted the 2013 Medium Manufacturer of the Year award on behalf of 3M. David Hendrixson, Daikin America’s vice president and plant manager (left), who represented the 2012 Medium Manufacturer of the Year, and Governor Robert Bentley presented the award.
GATR Technologies, for Ground Antenna Transmit and Receive Technologies, is the epitome of the entrepreneurial spirit and resourcefulness having grown from sharing space with a wholesale florist shop in 2004, to a multi-million dollar operation that employs 40 people in north Alabama. The company has earned awards as one of the fastest growing private companies producing technologically significant inventions.

GATR Technologies, Inc. makes locally designed-and-developed compact, portable, inflatable satellite antennas. GATR products are used by the military, public safety agencies, humanitarian organizations, and the intelligence community. The inflatable antenna enables portable Internet access, voice-over Internet protocol, email, video teleconferencing, broadcast television, and other high-bandwidth communications. The unique, compact product is portable and can be set up in remote areas.

GATR received a continuous improvement grant from the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development for International Organization for Standardization 9001 Certification. In 2008, GATR became the first inflatable satellite antenna certified by the Federal Communications Commission.

GATR said its products, in addition to their usefulness, are portable, comparatively light weight, and more cost effective than standard deployable satellite dishes. The 2.4-meter antenna system can be packed into two cases weighing less than 99 pounds each.

GATR Technologies President and CEO Paul Gierow (center) accepted the 2013 Small Manufacturer of the Year award. BCA Chairman Carl Jamison and Governor Robert Bentley presented the award.