The Business Council of Alabama and the Alabama Technology Network, in partnership with The Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama and the National Association of Manufacturers, presented the prestigious Alabama Manufacturer of the Year Awards to three outstanding Alabama manufacturers.

Recipients of the 2014 awards were in the large, medium, and small manufacturing category: Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. of Gadsden, Prystup Packaging Products Inc. of Livingston, and Back Forty Beer Co. of Gadsden, respectively.

The awards recognize Alabama manufacturers that exhibit excellence in leadership, performance, profitability, and workforce relations. An independent panel of judges selects the winners who demonstrate superior performance in customer focus, employee commitment, operational excellence, continuous improvement, profitable growth, and investment in training and retraining.

The first awards ceremony was in 2000. This year’s event on May 14 and attended by about 225 people was held at the Alabama Activity Center in Montgomery.

“Now in its 15th year, the Business Council of Alabama is honored to salute Alabama’s best manufacturers for their valuable participation in not only the state’s economy but also the economies of their employees and the suppliers who do business with them,” said BCA President and CEO William J. Canary.

Finalists for 2014 were Back Forty Beer Co. of Gadsden; Belle Chevre of Elkmont; BP America Inc. of Decatur; Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. of Gadsden; Gulf Packaging of Bay Minette; Prystup Packaging Products Inc. of Livingston; Segers Aero Corp. of Fairhope; and SPOC Automation of Trussville.

Alaska’s Outstanding Manufacturers for 2014 Honored by BCA, ATN

BY DANA BEYERLE

Top: More than 200 people attended this year’s Manufacturer of the Year Awards luncheon in Montgomery.

Left: Mercedes-Benz U.S. International President and CEO Jason Hoff delivered this year’s keynote address.
Manufacturers of the Year continued

The categories are based on the number of employees: the large category is for more than 400 employees, the medium category is for 100 to 399 employees, and the small category is from 1 to 99 employees.

“The Manufacturer of the Year Awards continue to be a premier event for the BCA, the Alabama Technology Network, the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama, and the National Association of Manufacturers,” Canary said. “The BCA is proud to be the exclusive affiliate in Alabama to the NAM and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.”

Mercedes-Benz Alabama boss lauds state work force

Jason Hoff, President and CEO of Mercedes-Benz U.S. International in Vance, was the keynote speaker. Incidentally, Mercedes-Benz U.S. International was the 2013 Large Manufacturer of the Year recipient.

Announced in 1993 as Mercedes-Benz’s first automotive assembly plant outside of Germany, Mercedes-Benz U.S. International has grown to be a premier international operating center for the vehicle maker. Mercedes-Benz has invested more than $4.4 billion in the Vance operation.

The plant employs about 4,500 people but at any given moment the Vance operation can host up to 7,500 men and women who either work for Mercedes-Benz, work for suppliers, contractors, or are in training.

“People in the plant make you successful,” Hoff said. “The reason Mercedes-Benz came to Alabama was because of her people. Our slogan is ‘Alabamians building nothing but the best’.”

Wetumpka High School Robotics competition wins award

Other awards were presented including the BEST Robotics Inc. award to Wetumpka High School whose students worked in the program located at Auburn University. BEST Robotics excites and inspires students about engineering, science, and technology careers through participation in sports-like competition.
Education’s importance to Alabama’s manufacturing was recognized

BY DANA BEYERLE

Another award that was presented is not an annual award – the Governor Bob Riley “Building a Better Alabama” award first presented in 2010 to then-Governor Riley. The award is in recognition of individuals who work tirelessly to promote manufacturing and economic development in Alabama.

This year’s recipients were state School Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice and Alabama Community College System Chancellor Dr. Mark Heinrich.

The business community is the largest consumer of the products of the education systems in Alabama so it is imperative that graduates possess the skills and education that the 21st century workplace needs.

Education is important to foster Alabama’s rapidly growing high-tech, biotech, and research industries into the economy of tomorrow. To do so, Alabama must provide students with the education and skills that those jobs demand.

“Dr. Tommy Bice and Dr. Mark Heinrich have worked to provide a roadmap for student learning, a roadmap that begins at Pre-K and goes two years past high school,” said Business Council of Alabama President and CEO William J. Canary. “Drs. Bice and Heinrich are finding innovative ways to bridge the gap between how students learn and what is expected of them in the work they are entering.”

Elected governor twice, Riley served from 2003-2011.

Above, left: Former Alabama Gov. Bob Riley was on hand to present the award named in his honor, the Governor Bob Riley “Building a Better Alabama” award.

Above, right: The 2014 Governor Bob Riley “Building a Better Alabama” award recipients are state School Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice and Alabama Community College System Chancellor Dr. Mark Heinrich. Former Gov. Bob Riley was on hand to present the award named in his honor. Pictured are: Chester Vrocher, ATN acting executive director; Fred McCallum, BCA Chairman; Heinrich; Bice; Riley; and William J. Canary, BCA president and CEO.
Airbus in Mobile was named Emerging Manufacturer of the Year in recognition as an emerging star in Alabama. The award is not given annually but was bestowed this year on Airbus that is building a $600 million assembly plant to employ up to 1,000 men and women. Production will begin next year and the first flight of Mobile-built Airbus A320 passenger jetliners is scheduled for 2016.

With Airbus, Alabama can now add modern aircraft manufacturing to its ever-expanding diverse manufacturing base that includes automobiles, engines, rockets, tires, biotech products, food products, and more.

Airbus announced on July 2, 2012, that it would build an assembly line for its A320 family of aircraft in Mobile. Construction began April 8, 2013, with a groundbreaking ceremony attended by Airbus and European Aeronautic Defense and Space Co. executives, Alabama officials, airline customers, industry suppliers, and employees who will produce four aircraft per month beginning next year. EADS was organized in 2000 but became Airbus Group in January.

The decision to create a new Mobile assembly line supports a commitment to meet airline demands for modern, fuel-efficient aircraft as well as the company’s strategy of increasing its global industrial presence, according to Airbus.

Airbus already makes 13 different models of passenger aircraft and produces freighters, military, and corporate aircraft. If you’ve flown in the last 30 years, you’ve probably traveled in an Airbus. More than 2,100 Airbus aircraft have been delivered to customers in the United States since the first Airbus jetliner in 1978.

Airbus began seeking its first assembly line manufacturing employees in February. Initial open positions included aircraft structure/installation mechanics, installers for aircraft cabin furnishings, and aircraft electricians. Successful candidates then were to take part in more training with Airbus teams in Hamburg, Germany, Toulouse, France, and possibly Tianjin, China, before returning to Mobile. Hiring for manufacturing jobs will continue throughout 2014.

Airbus and Alabama conducted a seven-year courtship beginning in 2005 but another airline manufacturer was the winner of an Air Force refueling plane contract. Officials didn’t give up and in 2012 Airbus President and CEO Fabrice Bregier announced the company would build its A320 family of aircraft at the Brookley Aeroplex.

“The town is right, the talent is right and the time is right,” Bregier said. “Airbus is going to make world-beating A320 family of aircraft, right here in the United States of America.”

Bregier said it was a strategic move to be visible in the United States in order to respond to customers in North and South America, which wanted a closer manufacturing center. Bregier also said the company “felt comfortable here, felt supported here. It is a true partnership.”

Above: Airbus was awarded the 2014 Emerging Manufacturer of the Year Awards. Pictured l to r: Chester Vrocher, ATN acting executive director; Michelle Hurdle, director of Economic and Community Development at Airbus America’s Engineering; William J. Canary, BCA president and CEO; and Fred McCallum, BCA chairman.
The 2014 Small Manufacturer of the Year is one of the state’s new entries in a growing national trend. Founded in 2009, the Back Forty Beer Co. is now the largest manufacturer of alcohol in Alabama. It plans to expand this year and create new opportunities for the community.

How did Back Forty Beer Co. get its unusual name? Back Forty is an old farming term referring to the 40 acres of land farthest from the barn. Like the back 40 acres, which often has very fertile land and is capable of producing a tremendous crop, the company says the Deep South’s craft beer culture is fertile and ready for harvest.

Back Forty Beer Co. is located in a 72-year-old, 27,000-square-feet building. The downtown brewery produces seven award-winning artisan craft beers that are available for distribution in the Southeast. Back Forty Beer Co. also has an export development program focusing on Canada, Japan, Brazil, and Sweden.

Back Forty Beer Co. serves the rapidly growing niche beer market and its products are available in Alabama’s major retail and grocery stores and in two popular eateries.

Back Forty Beer Co. employees participate in ongoing training provided by the Master Brewers Association of America, as well as in-house training.

The training includes beer production, packaging, quality control, and logistics. Back Forty Beer Co. is involved in community activities, supporting numerous charities, youth and senior organizations, and outdoor activities.

Back Forty Beer Co. CEO Jason Wilson (second from right) accepted the 2014 Small Manufacturer of the Year award on behalf of Back Forty. Tom Honeycutt of GATR Technologies (second from left), who represented the 2013 Small Manufacturer of the Year GATR Technologies, announced the award. Also pictured from left: Chester Vrocher, ATN acting executive director; Honeycutt; Back Forty Beer Co.’s Jessica White, Carrie Machen, Tripp Collins, and Jason Wilson; and William J. Canary, BCA president and CEO.
This West Alabama manufacturer operates four production lines in 220,000 square feet of buildings. A new building of 90,000 square feet will house a fifth manufacturing line of paperboard packaging products for a total of 310,000 square feet of operations.

Prystup is now in its third generation of leadership. The company began in 1980 with retirement talk by Les and Kathryn Prystup who already had 30 years in the folding carton industry. That spring they gathered 20 family members and some friends, discarded any notion of retirement, and created a privately owned, independent folding carton company in Sumter County.

Prystup Packaging Products was incorporated on June 1 and production began on July 1. Remember, 1980 was a time of high interest rates and a recession. Thirteen years later, Prystup expanded to a second plant in Demopolis.

Prystup’s founding principles are: family, integrity, and excellence. The Prystup Packaging brand is dedicated to customers, employees, suppliers, stockholders, and the community. Its state-of-the-art production capabilities and an award-winning staff of professionals have enabled the company to expand four times.

Prystup produces paperboard folding cartons, sleeves, deli back cards, bottle neck bands, and point-of-purchase advertising. The company serves customers in snack foods, dry goods, health and beauty aids, and supplies packaging for giants in the retail food and health aid industries.

Prystup regularly involves employees in work teams to produce new ideas to improve production and reduce costs. Its innovation teams meet weekly to improve both internal and customer processes.

Prystup employees have served on the city council of Livingston, the board of directors of the Coleman Center for the Arts in York, and support local athletic teams, churches, and charity organizations. Prystup Packaging Products is involved in the arts, education, and the Chamber of Commerce.

Leslie Emory of Prystup Packaging Products, Inc. (second from left) accepted the 2014 Medium Manufacturer of the Year award on behalf of Prystup Packaging Products, Inc. Rod Northam (center), plant manager for 3M’s Guin facility, represented the 2013 Medium Manufacturer of the Year and presented the award. Also pictured from left: Chester Vrocher, ATN acting executive director; Emory; Northam; Fred McCallum, BCA chairman; and William J. Canary, BCA president and CEO.
The manufacturing Advocate

2014 Large Manufacturer of the Year
(More than 400 employees)
Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co., Gadsden

This automotive component manufacturing legend has been operating in Alabama for 85 years. With a combination of leadership, strategic investment, and dedicated employees, the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. plant in Gadsden has rolled out millions of tires.

Goodyear-Gadsden is the largest employer in Etowah County. It’s a powerful Northeast Alabama presence and remains a leader in modern tire technology and production. It has been a good place to work. Incidentally, one of its employees was to celebrate his 71st service anniversary in June.

The first Goodyear tire was produced in Gadsden on June 21, 1929. During World War II, the plant produced gas masks, fuel tanks, rubber rafts, and life jackets and then graduated to bias ply tires, truck tires, and Jeep and Hummer tires for the planet’s motorists.

Today, the plant’s 1,550 employees produce original equipment and replacement tires under the Goodyear, Dunlop, and Kelly brand names.

Goodyear-Gadsden transitioned from being a tire maker to being a superior tire supplier of choice. The plant’s leadership team recognized that efficiency and flexibility create a customer-focused and cost-competitive operation. Incidentally, the Alabama Technology Network provides training for electricians, welders, designated safety leaders, and labor trainers.

The plant produced 5,000 more tires per month in 2013 than 2012, without hiring additional labor. Last year, the plant delivered more than $12 million in cost savings and it targets $15 million this year.

The Goodyear-Gadsden plant today is one of the state’s premier manufacturers, enhancing company profits, and increasing its market share with its 100-percent on-time delivery for original equipment customers, as well as replacement tire customers. Not bad for an 85-year-old.

Goodyear-Gadsden’s Plant Director Gordon Linkous (center) accepted the 2014 Large Manufacturer of the Year award from Jason Hoff, president and CEO of Mercedes-Benz U.S. International (second from left). MBUSI was the 2013 Large Manufacturer of the Year. Also pictured from left: Sen. Phil Williams (R-Rainbow City); Hoff; Linkous; Chester Vrocher, ATN acting executive director, and William J. Canary, BCA president and CEO.
The Business Advocate is published by the Business Council of Alabama, Alabama’s foremost voice for business. The BCA is a non-partisan statewide business association representing the interests and concerns of three-quarters of a million working Alabamians through its member companies, and is Alabama’s exclusive representative to the National Association of Manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Send all submissions to Nancy Hewston, Business Council of Alabama, 2 N Jackson St., Montgomery, AL 36104. Call (334) 240-8725 or nancyh@bcatoday.org. For information on becoming a member of BCA, contact Elaine Fincannon, 334-240-8749, or elainef@bcatoday.org.

For more information, visit bcatoday.org.

THE BUSINESS COUNCIL OF ALABAMA’S Chairman’s Dinner 2014

featuring FORMER GOV. JEB BUSH

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2014

5:30 P.M. RECEPTION
7:00 P.M. DINNER

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