

Gulfstream Aerospace to expand operations in Cahokia Heights

Company expansion of St. Clair County facility creates 200 new jobs, retains nearly 500 current

Governor JB Pritzker, Gulfstream Aerospace Corp. and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) announced on June 20, 2023, that Gulfstream will expand its operations at the St. Louis Downtown Airport, creating 200 new full-time jobs and retaining nearly 500 existing jobs.

New investments will enable the company to increase completions and outfitting operations while investing in modernization at its Cahokia Heights facility.

“Illinois sits at the heart of the Midwest—serving as a major transportation hub for cargo and passengers alike,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Gulfstream’s latest \$28.5 million investment into Cahokia Heights’ St. Louis Downtown Airport speaks to the steps my administration has taken to attract new businesses to our state—all while modernizing our infrastructure and supporting our workforce to meet the

demands of our 21st century economy.”

Through a \$28.5 million investment, Gulfstream Aerospace Corp. — which designs, develops and services the world’s leading business aircraft — will be expanding its Cahokia Heights facility which will enable the company to increase capacity for exterior aircraft painting, furniture installations, avionics integrations and other operations.

The company’s investment will also modernize facilities adding state-of-the-art equipment and tooling while improving energy efficiency and reducing waste. Once complete, the expansion will bring Gulfstream’s total footprint at Cahokia Heights’s St. Louis Downtown Airport to 642,657 square feet.

“We are excited to announce the expansion of our facility operations in Cahokia Heights,” said Mark Burns, president, Gulfstream. “This is a direct response to the increased demand we are seeing from around the world, and we appreciate our

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Jay Hoffman
Assistant Majority Leader
(D-Swansea)

partnerships with the state of Illinois, St. Clair County, Bi-State Development, the city of Cahokia Heights and the village of Sauget for their contin-

ued support as we grow our presence and local workforce in the region.”

As part of the expansion, the company received an Economic Development for a Growing Economy (EDGE) tax credit, which stipulates a goal of making a \$28.5 million investment and creating 200 new full-time jobs and retaining nearly 500 jobs.

“Gulfstream’s expansion creates hundreds of jobs in the Metro East Region and equally important, strengthens the aviation and aerospace workforce pipeline through training partnerships,” said DCEO Director Kristin Richards. “Illinois has long been a destination for aviation and aerospace leaders and through EDGE, DCEO is working to further expand the ecosystem.”

Gulfstream’s expansion adds hundreds of new career opportunities in avionics, interior installations, structures and testing, as well as positions in procurement, parts management, customer service, and engineering.

To help build the talent pipeline in the region, Gulfstream is partnering with several local educational institutions, including East St. Louis Senior High School, The Center for Academic & Vocational Excellence (The CAVE) in Belleville, and Cahokia High School.

“Gulfstream’s announcement is evidence that the aerospace and manufacturing industry has a strong future in the Metro East,” said Assistant Majority Leader Jay Hoffman (D-Swansea). “In the General Assembly, I’ve been an advocate for making sure that we have the tools we need to attract, retain, and grow stellar companies in Illinois.”

“I’m so proud of the investment that Gulfstream is making in the hard working men and women of St. Clair County,” said State Senator Christopher Belt (D-Swansea). “I know that Gulfstream will continue to be successful and grow here because we have a skilled and trained workforce that is ready to go.”

“Every new job created in St. Clair County is worth celebrating, but I’m especially excited about the 200 new jobs that Gulfstream will be creating at their expanded facility,” said State Rep. Kevin Schmidt (R-Millstadt). “They could have gone anywhere in the country, but they are here because Illinois has the workforce and infrastructure.”

Gulfstream’s facility is located in St. Clair County at the St. Louis Downtown Airport — which serves as the busiest general aviation airport in Illinois outside of the Chicago area. The airport is a significant driver of local and state economies, contributing more than \$422 million in economic impact for the region annually, including more than 1,500 jobs. The airport supports recreational and business flying as well as flight instruction.

In April 2023, Governor Pritzker announced a \$5.4 million Rebuild Illinois investment in St. Louis Downtown Airport to improve safety, reliability and efficiency while boosting airport business and global competitiveness. The investment funds a ground run-up and compass calibration pad that include new airfield pavement with jet blast deflectors. The engine run-up will be isolated from airfield operations, reducing noise levels by more than 50% and accommodating the airport’s largest aircraft.

Unity

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Castillo conversed with roundtable participants with a goal of learning more about what changes need to be made at the federal level for workforce and economic development and growth, as well as what she referred to as the “wrap-around services,” or the related support services of economic development initiatives and effectiveness.

Alton Mayor David Goins welcomed everyone, and noted that those at the table, “...all have a common goal of seeing our communities grow. We are no longer competitive with each other. We all want each of us to thrive...”

Rep. Budzinski asked others seated at the table to introduce themselves and for the mayors and community officials to briefly identify some challenges they need help with for their community or for the region.

Granite City Mayor Mike Parkinson said, “Granite City is like Alton, we’re an older town. We’ve got the steel mill. We’re going through a massive transition in our town, planning for, but hoping it doesn’t happen, the absence of the steel mill. So, grants are of extreme importance to us as we try to retrain the workforce and look for ways to do that.

“As we look for new industry, we have opened up a lot of greenspaces in our town, and as we redevelop the land, we need grants to help do that,” Parkinson added. “We apply for grants, but we never know when applying, if they’re even on the table for us. We spend a lot of time writing the grants, not knowing if we have a shot at getting them. If we could find a way to let us know what the rating scale is going to be for those grants, it may save us time and effort on which grants we go after.”

South Roxana Mayor Barb Overton noted that a source for matching funds would help give her community some capacity for growth, and Wood River City Manager Steve Palen concurred. Palen also said that streamlining the grant funding process is something that would be helpful.

Village of Dupu Trustee Dawn Keys talked about her community as a “small town, with few businesses, just trying to survive. A major help, among those she noted, would come from support of completion of the I-255 project, which began in 2005. Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick concurred with Keys, noting that it would be a boon to his community as well.

Among others who shared remarks were representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau President/CEO Cory Jobe, SIUE Chancellor Dr. James Minor, Dr. Lori Artis with Lewis and Clark Community College, and Illinois AFL-CIO Secretary/Treasurer Tim Drea.

As she wrapped up the roundtable discussion with some final remarks, Castillo said, “There’s something really magical in this region. I want to recommend, support, and hopefully partner with you.”

And, perhaps as a near-perfect example of the unique regional outlook Castillo came to witness, Granite City Mayor Parkinson made a last-minute pitch for a major need in the neighboring community of Madison. He asked for help with the \$30 million needed to get the Chain of Rocks canal bridge fixed.

“One of the biggest economic stories in our region is Route 66. And there’s a bridge that is owned by the City of Madison to the island that separates Illinois and Missouri. They’ve applied for funding to get the bridge

fixed, but they’re denied because the amount of its traffic doesn’t meet the standards for funding grants for bridges.

Parkinson continued: “The problem is, if that bridge doesn’t get fixed, it will cut off access to the island, which is a tourism site for the region. The bridge itself is a tourism site for the region. It is the original entry point of Route 66 in Illinois. It needs to be a landmark; it needs to be repaired and not torn down. You will only have access to that island by foot from Missouri if we allow this to happen.

“And we will lose a major tourism site and what should be a historical bridge in Illinois if we don’t find the funding to fix that bridge. The City of Madison, I would argue, is the poorest community in our region and they don’t have the money to fix it. It’s imperative that we find some resources to help them,” Parkinson added further.

Castillo replied with a promise to work with Rep. Budzinski and Illinois Deputy Governor Andy Manar to determine what that would look like and what funding options there would be for saving the bridge.

“Economic development is a core value in each community, and it was great to meet with Assistant Secretary Castillo,” said Senator Erica Harriss (R-Glen Carbon), reflecting on the event. “It’s good to know that our region has a seat at the table for future opportunities to further grow and invest in the cities across our state especially here in the Metro East in which I proudly represent. Economic development should most certainly be a bipartisan issue and this roundtable discussion was a great step in making sure everyone and their ideas were heard. I look forward to working with constituents, businesses, and Secretary Castillo’s office with the hope to secure more economic dollars for our region.”