

# **Celebrating 10 years, Toyota rolls out welcome mat, announces visitor center**

April 13, 2017

Image not found or type unknown



BLUE SPRINGS, Miss., (April 13, 2017) – Toyota is rolling out the welcome mat at its Blue Springs manufacturing facility. The automaker today announced it will build a nearly \$10 million visitor and interactive training center that will offer public tours showcasing how nearly 2,000 Mississippians produce ever-better Corolla vehicles. That announcement came during a celebration of the 10-year anniversary of the groundbreaking for Toyota Mississippi.

Sean Suggs, vice president of manufacturing for Toyota Mississippi, said this is an opportunity to tell the story of the quality work Mississippi team members put forth daily. “This investment will allow us to build an interactive visitor and training center that will spotlight the Corolla’s rise to the best-selling car in the world, as well as delve into the history of Toyota and our Blue Springs facility. It represents a continued commitment to our team members and the Northeast Mississippi community.”

During guided group plant tours, guests will see the Toyota Production System at work. Construction on the 15,000 square foot visitor and interactive training center is expected to begin late 2018 with a targeted completion date in mid-2019.

Visitors, however, won’t have to wait long to tour the plant. Toyota Mississippi will begin offering plant tours on May 1, 2017. One hour tours are available Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9 a.m., 11:30 a.m., and 1:30 p.m., with each tour able to accommodate 12 people. Reservations are required and may be made by calling 662-317-3002 or emailing [tourms@toyota.com](mailto:tourms@toyota.com).

Team member Bethanie Humphries hopes tour-goers will gain an appreciation for the plant and what it means to the community. A native of northeast Mississippi, she moved away after college and worked for another automaker. “When I heard Toyota was building a plant in Blue Springs, I jumped at the chance [to] work for an industry leader and move closer to family with my daughter. Nine years later, I can tell you, we all have a sense of pride when we tell people, ‘I work for Toyota Mississippi.’”

Toyota Mississippi President Akitoshi Ichino said continued investment in the plant is a testament to the dedication of team members. “They are proud to produce high-quality vehicles, safely, every day. It’s their hard work that keeps our plant competitive.”

Ground was broken on the 1,700-acre Northeast Mississippi site in April 2007. Later this year, the 1-millionth Corolla will roll off the line at the 2-million square foot facility.

“The addition of a visitor and interactive training center demonstrates Toyota’s commitment to growing the region’s economy through new investment while highlighting the plant and its skilled workforce,” Gov. Phil Bryant said. “Since announcing it would locate this state-of-the-art facility in Mississippi, Toyota has continued to place our state and thriving automotive industry on the global stage. The new visitor and training center will allow people from around the world to witness first-hand the numerous reasons the world’s best-selling vehicle is made right here in Mississippi.”

Over the past 60 years, Toyota has invested nearly \$22 billion in its American facilities. In 2017, the automaker announced a commitment to invest \$10 billion in its U.S. manufacturing plants over the next five years. Based on 2015 data, Toyota’s total U.S. employment impact is 470,100 jobs (direct, indirect and spin-off), according to a study by the Center for Automotive Research (CAR) – an independent think tank.

### **Building the community**

Toyota also announced donations totaling \$350,000 during the anniversary celebration. The contributions focus on investing in the next generation through programs for STEM and family literacy.

- A \$175,000 gift was given to the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) to establish a Toyota Family Learning program in Tupelo. It is being implemented at three Family Resource Center of Northeast Mississippi sites. Research shows the model elevates the parent and the child through two-generation literacy, providing parents with workforce and life skills, and, improving educational outcomes for students throughout their academic career.

Toyota has partnered with NCFL for 26 years, investing more than \$46 million in the organization's two-generation literacy model. In that time, Toyota Family Literacy programs have touched the lives of more than 2 million families at nearly 300 sites in 57 communities and in 32 states.

- The Toyota USA Foundation also donated \$175,000 to Mississippi BEST (Boosting Engineering Science and Technology) Robotics at Mississippi State University. The program exposes middle and high school students to the engineering-design process. The students participate in a six-week robot-building program where they design, build and present their creation during a business and marketing competition. Toyota Mississippi has worked with local schools over the past six years to increase participation in the program by students and mentors.

The donation is the largest ever made to Mississippi BEST Robotics, highlighting Toyota's commitment to investing in programs that encourage students to participate in STEM fields.

"We must invest in our future workforce and need more skilled workers to continue making quality vehicles at Toyota Mississippi," said Mike Botkin, vice president of administration at Toyota Mississippi. "Toyota Family Learning through NCFL and Mississippi BEST Robotics at MSU are working to build the pipeline of skilled workers of tomorrow."

Earlier this year, Toyota also announced a \$750,000 donation to the 2 Museum Project in Jackson, Miss. The donation, in conjunction with Mississippi's 200<sup>th</sup> year of statehood, will provide for a permanent gallery – the Toyota Gallery – at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, and will help advance programming at the Museum of Mississippi History.

The donations speak to Toyota's commitment to investing in the communities where its team members live, work and play, Botkin said. For Toyota Mississippi, it began at the groundbreaking in 2007 when a \$50 million Toyota Wellspring Education Fund was announced to enhance public education in Pontotoc, Union and Lee counties.

Toyota has donated more than \$3.2 million to local non-profits to meet the critical needs and improve the quality of life for the people of Mississippi since 2011. Team members are also working hard to impact their communities, logging more than 25,000 volunteer hours since Toyota Mississippi launched its "Leave Your Print" program in 2012.

Toyota Mississippi will continue to celebrate its 10-year anniversary throughout the year with a culminating free community concert in November.