

LANSING REGION'S ECONOMIC GROWTH

Spartan Motors posts Best Quarter



In the first quarter of this year, Charlotte-based Spartan Motors more than doubled its earnings and posted its best quarter ever. During the first three months of the year,

Spartan Motors posted a profit of \$14.78 million and sales of \$264.1 million. Spartan Motors attributes this to the growing demand for military and emergency vehicles and parts.

Okemos-based Playmakers Sees Sales Increase 12 Percent

Playmakers, a family-owned and operated sporting goods store, had a 12 percent sales increase last year. Curt Munson, owner of Playmakers, attributes this sales increase to many different reasons, including satisfactory customer service and a rise in the interest of health and fitness. Playmakers also expects to see a 10 percent increase or better this year.

Niowave Lands Federal Designation

Lansing-based Niowave Inc. has been designated as a "qualified supplier" for the U.S. Energy Department. Niowave is one of only three U.S. companies with this designation. President Terry Grimm hopes the designation will help Michigan State University win a grant to build a \$500 million Rare Isotope Beams Facility, which would be 1,000 times more powerful than the current machine running at MSU's National Superconducting Cyclotron Facility.

FinCor's 2007 Revenues hit \$97.2 Million

FinCor Holdings of Lansing saw revenues increase by 5.7 percent to \$97.2 million. The growth is attributed to the acquisition of Washington Casualty Company. Sales for the company have increased by 74 percent between 2003 and 2006. Inc. magazine recently named FinCor among the 5,000 fastest-growing private countries in the country.

Liquid Web Plans Delta Township HQ

Web hosting company Liquid Web has picked a 90,000-square-foot site in Delta Township for its new headquarters. Founded in 1997 by 1999 Holt High School graduate Matthew Hill, Liquid Web will eventually add 600 new jobs. The \$80 million site will have space for 25,000 servers and will be opened in the first quarter of 2009. Liquid Web is a website-hosting company that was recently recognized by Inc. 5000 as one of the fastest growing private companies in the country.



Jackson National Generates \$3.5 Billion in First Quarter Sales

Jackson National Life recently reported sales of \$3.5 billion, its second highest first quarter sales in the company's history. Of the total sales, \$2.7 billion came from retail sales and deposits. The company is attributing the elevated sales to its diverse retirement portfolio. "Jackson is well-positioned to seize the tremendous opportunities created by this retirement wave and deliver long-term, profitable sales growth," said Clark Manning, Jackson National Life's president and chief executive officer.

Auto-Owners Keeps Top Ratings

Credit Rating Company A.M. Best Co. maintained Delta Township-based Auto-Owners Insurance Group's high ratings. These ratings include an "A++" financial strength rating, which is the highest rating possible in regards to financial strength, and an "AA+" issuer credit rating.



Capitol Towers Still Rising in Downtown Lansing

What once was a 12-story development, the \$22.5 million luxury condo development on Grand Ave. in Lansing has just added 6 more stories to the building's design. Capitol Towers developers, Shawn Elliott and Allen Drouare have been successfully shopping their proposal to investors. The project which includes retail space, dry cleaners, a coffee shop and a fitness center drew more than 300 investors to the first presentation. Conveniently located within the tax-free Renaissance Zone, this building is in close proximity to bars and restaurants which has made living in Downtown Lansing more appealing to renters and buyers.



New Master Plan in the Works for Potter Park Zoo

It has been more than ten years since South Lansing's Potter Park Zoo had an updated master plan but zoo director, Gerry Brady, hopes to have one rolled out by the end of this year. "The whole zoo will be improved and will include many different dimensions," said Brady. Some of the different dimensions will include an overall business plan; a marketing and development plan; community development; site development; exhibits. Currently Lansing Potter Park zoo is one of roughly 200 accredited zoos in the country. The U.S. has roughly 2,000 zoos, but only 10 percent of them are accredited. Last fall, the Potter Park Zoo was recognized as one of the best zoos and aquariums in the country by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums.

Eaton Rapids firm to Add 159 Jobs

Motor manufacturer Von Weise Inc. plans to add 159 jobs over seven years. Von Weise will consolidate their operations in Indiana and Missouri to its plant in Eaton Rapids. The company chose Eaton Rapids over Juarez, Mexico for expansion. Von Weise, which makes small motors for a variety of items, will expand the facility and buy \$3.3 million worth in new equipment while moving equipment from the other facilities to the Eaton Rapids location.

Major Redevelopment Plans in Works for Lansing Township

Development plans, centered around Eastwood Towne Center, are in the works for Lansing Township. These plans include a hotel, an indoor water park, a conference center, and new stores and shops. Workers are already prepping for future development in the area next to Eastwood Towne Center. "We're still fielding national calls for our hotels and retailers that want to locate at Eastwood", said Steve Hayward of the Eastwood Downtown Development Authority. With so many offers, the already busy Eastwood Towne Center could get busier.



Emergent buys rival in anthrax vaccine field

Emergent BioSolutions Inc., the producer of the nation's only FDA approved anthrax vaccine, has purchased the anthrax vaccine technology of VaxGen Inc., their main U.S. competitor. The acquisition of VaxGen Inc.'s technology will add a second product line in their Lansing Plant. Emergent currently makes the BioThrax vaccine in Lansing. Lansing "really stands as the centerpiece of manufacturing for the entire corporation," spokeswoman Kim Brennan Root said. The Lansing facility will continue to make the original BioThrax as well as the new vaccine.

Len Adds Employees to Leslie Manufacturing Company

Len Industries, a maker of complex, machined components for the auto industry and industrial companies recorded revenue growth of \$40 million last year. An increase of \$14 million from the previous year, the additional revenue helped acquire 50 new employees. While currently exporting world-wide, Len Industries is looking to add new manufacturing programs to increase production and stay on top of the industry.

Business Nonprofit Changing Name

The Lansing Community Micro-Enterprise Fund has changed its name to the Entrepreneur Institute of Mid-Michigan. The nonprofit works with emerging businesses by providing educational resources and financing options. The reason for this change is to aid in an effort to expand its service area. The name change emphasizes the Institute's commitment to the entire Mid-Michigan region rather than just the Lansing community.



Brewery to Open Doors in August

Webberville-based Michigan Brewing Co. plans to open a microbrewery and pub at 402 S. Washington Square in August.

Owner Bobby Mason hopes that his store will give people "other reasons to go downtown" by adding a new business. Michigan Brewing Co. is also enhancing its headquarters in Williamston by adding onto the 76,000-square-foot headquarters.

Michigan brewing produced 4,000 barrels of craft beer last year and plan to make 7,800-8,000 barrels this year. They currently ship beer to 10 different states and to Sweden.



Eaton Rapids Expanding Medical Center

The Eaton Rapids Medical Center recently broke ground on a 25,000 square foot expansion which will include a 14,000 square foot emergency room expansion. The new space will also have ambulance quarters, a new waiting room, and specialty clinics. The expansion will give the medical center four more beds, increasing its total to ten. This will give patients the ability to register bedside rather than getting evaluated after registering.

City Center II Plans get Council OK

The East Lansing City Council unanimously approved the site plans and zoning for the City Center II project. The \$116.4 million development will span 5.81 acres from Grand River Avenue and Abbot Road to Valley Court Park. The project includes a 10-story mixed-use building, a 110-120 room hotel, a 400-seat performing arts theater, a five-story residential and retail building, a four-story apartment building, and twelve three-story townhouses.

St. Johns Manufacturing Expansion

German company, GmgH, is expanding its business unit in St. Johns. Piston ring manufacturer Mahle Engine Components USA Inc. plans a local expansion that eventually will create 150 jobs. Mahle will add 30,000 square feet to its St. Johns plant with an investment of \$18.2 million. The company is expected to create 150 plant jobs due to the expansion, phased in over five years, with fifty new workers hired in 2009. In addition to the incentives given by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the City of St. Johns will give Mahle three tax abatements worth \$26.1 million.

ESG Opens Office in Lansing

Indianapolis-based Energy Systems Group (ESG) has opened an office in Lansing. This office is the 11th national office for the company. ESG, which helps companies increase energy efficiency thereby cutting energy costs, was attracted to Lansing because of the growth in the Mid-Michigan Area. "Opening an office in Lansing just seemed like a great opportunity to better position us in the market," says Meram El Ramahi, an ESG spokeswoman.

LAFCU Builds Branch in Eaton Rapids

The Lansing Automakers Federal Credit Union opened its \$2 million branch this May. The 3,500 square foot branch employs nine people. LAFCU also has a role in the new Eaton Rapids Medical Center: By investing in the community, LAFCU is making sure the community has access to health care.

Ovid Milk Processing Plant Expands in Agricultural Processing Renaissance Zone

Michigan Milk Producers Association (MMPA) announced the recent designation of an Agricultural Processing Renaissance Zone at their plant in Ovid. The expansion is expected to generate private investment of \$35 million and create 510 jobs for the state, including retaining 86 current full-time positions and adding 10 new positions directly to the Ovid plant. To make the expansion possible, an existing rail-to-trail linking Ionia and Owosso needed to be rerouted. Working with the Michigan Department of Transportation, MMPA entered a purchase and rental agreement rerouting the corridor and paving the way for the expansion to take place. The agreement has led to a 41-mile Rails to Trails corridor that will connect 16 local communities in Clinton, Ionia and Shiawassee counties, bringing new recreational and tourism activities and spurring economic growth and new business in the area.

**If you have economic growth stories,
please let us know. We compile
stories from many different sources
and would love to share your news!**

Contact Katharine Czarnecki at kczarnecki@lansingchamber.org!

