

Retiring Comfortably

According to a report released last month by the national Plootus Research Team, Mississippi was ranked 2nd in the “Top 10 Most Affordable States to Retire (2026)” thus proving how efforts to draw retirees (defined as 65-plus) to the state are working—and for tangible financial reasons. The Plootus report ranked all 50 states by retirement affordability, drawing on expenditure data adjusted for state cost of living, to show annual costs, minimum savings requirements, retiree tax environment and which states also offer “decent healthcare and quality of life” according to the company’s site. More good news for our Mississippi. **MBJ**

MDPS Headquarters Signal Strong Future for State

A few days ago, Mississippi’s Department of Public Safety opened a unified headquarters in Jackson that will bring every division under one roof. This long-awaited step will improve coordination, speed response times, and better protect communities across the state. The building honors David Huggins, recognizing his legacy of service as Colonel of the Mississippi Highway Patrol and later Commissioner of Public Safety. His leadership helped shape the agency. This investment will strengthen public safety and build lasting trust across Mississippi for generations to come. **MBJ**

Is Healthcare a Luxury?

Across Mississippi at this very moment, especially in several rural communities, healthcare is slipping further out of reach. Even insured patients face high prescription costs, limited provider access, and growing mental health gaps. Hospital closures leave entire regions vulnerable, forcing long travel for basic care. The system increasingly operates like a business, not a lifeline. Healthcare should prioritize people over profit. Until then, too many lives will depend on what they can afford, not what they need. **MBJ**

BUSINESS QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“How you start is important, but it is how you finish that counts. In the race for success, speed is less important than stamina. The sticker outlasts the sprinter.” – B. C. Forbes

States’s Next Chapter: The Digital Frontier

By **BLAKE FERRETTI**

Mississippi’s economic story is changing and, increasingly, it’s being written in server racks and fiber lines as much as factories and farms.

In recent years, the Magnolia State has positioned itself as a rising hub for data infrastructure, pairing low energy costs and available land with a deliberate push to attract large-scale investment. The result is a surge of capital that is reshaping both perception and reality.

At the center of this shift is Amazon Web Services, which has committed roughly \$10 billion to build hyperscale data centers in Madison County. These facilities anchor what some leaders now

call a “Digital Delta,” reflecting Mississippi’s growing role in cloud computing and artificial intelligence.

Amazon is not alone. In what may be the most striking signal of Mississippi’s new economic identity, Elon Musk’s AI company, xAI, recently announced plans for a staggering \$20 billion data center project in DeSoto County. If that project reaches fruition, IT will be the largest in state history. These projects underscore how Mississippi is competing—and winning—in the race for



next-generation technology infrastructure.

However, the data center boom is only part of the story. Across the state, a

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The Importance of a CRE Broker for Cities

By **MICAH McCULLOUGH**

Mississippi’s commercial real estate market is experiencing one of the most active periods in its history. Since January 2024, approximately \$67 billion in new private-sector capital investment has been announced across the state, alongside a reshoring surge that ranked Mississippi third nationally in 2025. These figures reflect strong momentum, but they also point to a broader reality that merits greater attention. Every mayor, county supervisor, or local elected official in Mississippi is effectively managing a real estate portfolio, whether they recognize it or not.

Each zoning decision, permit timeline, fee-in-lieu agreement, and infrastructure investment directly influences the value, desirability, and feasibility of commercial property within a jurisdiction. Road

improvements can open new corridors or shift activity away from existing ones. Collectively, these decisions form a portfolio with an implicit balance sheet that can reach into the hundreds of millions of dollars in mid-sized Mississippi communities.

Despite this, consistent communication between local governments and the commercial real estate community is often lacking. In many cases, hesitation stems from concerns that an initial conversation may create an obligation to engage a firm later, uncertainty about confidentiality in early discussions, or a perception that brokers are focused only on transactions rather than the decisions that precede them. As a result, communities sometimes engage out-of-state consultants for studies costing more than \$30,000, even though local professionals could



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parallel wave of manufacturing expansion is reinforcing Mississippi's traditional strengths while pushing into new industries.

In north Mississippi, Amplify Cell Technologies—a joint venture backed by Cummins, Daimler Truck, and PACCAR—is building a massive battery cell manufacturing plant in Marshall County. The \$2–3 billion project is expected to create more than 2,000 jobs and help establish a domestic supply chain for electric commercial vehicles.

Meanwhile, in the Golden Triangle, PACCAR recently completed a \$209 million expansion of its Columbus manufacturing operations, adding production capacity and creating new

jobs in one of the state's most established industrial corridors. The same region continues to see momentum from Steel Dynamics and its ecosystem, including a new \$90 million Kloeckner Metals facility tied to aluminum production for automotive and industrial uses.

Elsewhere, long-standing manufacturers are doubling down. Nissan has committed \$500 million to retool its Canton plant for electric vehicle production, signaling confidence in Mississippi's automotive workforce and its role in the industry's transition.

Taken together, these projects point to a broader strategy: diversify while building on what works. Mississippi is blending advanced manufacturing with

next-generation infrastructure—batteries, aluminum, vehicles, and data centers—into a more resilient economic base.

The results are beginning to show. The state posted one of the fastest GDP growth rates in the nation in 2024, driven in large part by industrial expansion and new investment.

Mississippi is no longer just competing for the industries of the past. It is assembling the building blocks of the future—and doing so at a scale that is drawing national attention.

What's emerging is a new economic identity—one that blends Mississippi's industrial roots with a forward-looking embrace of technology and innovation.

From advanced manufacturing floors to sprawling data campuses, the state is proving it can compete on a national stage for both legacy industries and the digital economy. If this momentum continues, Mississippi won't just be participating in the next chapter of American growth—it will be helping to write it. **MBJ**

Blake Ferretti is a Mississippi-based entrepreneur and real estate investor who owns and operates a portfolio of commercial, multifamily, and residential properties, as well as several small businesses. He lives in Madison with his family.

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provide comparable analysis with stronger market context, often at a lower cost or as a professional courtesy.

When elected leaders and the local CRE community are actually talking, the results show up fast. Corridors fill. Underused sites are redeveloped. Speculative developments get built where needed. And announcements turn into real jobs and long-term tax

base, not just press releases.

The expertise already exists in every Mississippi community, and where it doesn't, someone elsewhere in the state is glad to help with a policy question, a highest-and-best-use read, or anything in between. These aren't billable hours; good CRE Advisors want to be part of these conversations. Thirty minutes and a cup of coffee with a local CCIM

or SIOR is a place to start. The worst thing any public official can do is make an uninformed decision that sets a community's trajectory back for years and is hard to undo once the dirt moves, so call early and call often. **MBJ**

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in Jackson. He has 18 years of commercial real estate experience, completing more than 600 transactions totaling over \$350 million throughout Mississippi and the Southeast. The firm advises owners, occupiers, and investors across industrial, office, retail, medical, and multifamily real estate sectors on an international basis through its affiliation with NAI Global.

Visit the

LYNYRD SKYNYRD

Monument

LOCATED AT THE CRASH SITE
IN GILLSBURG, MS
OFF OF HIGHWAY 568



WWW.LYNYRDSKYNRYRDMONUMENT.COM



The Lynyrd Skynyrd Monument came to life due to the many dedicated friends and fans of the band. We had an idea for a highway marker near the crash site on Hwy 568—it would give fans something to see, touch, remember, and have a picture of when visiting the crash site.

We wanted the marker to be an official Blues Trail Marker, authorized by the Mississippi Development Authority and included in their promotions. But after six months, we learned the marker was not going to be approved by our deadline. So, with donations above projections from fans far and near, the monument on private property was our solution.

Dwain and Lola Easley generously provided land on Easley Road, just east of

the original Highway 568 marker location. Monument project board members along with Dave Pace of Brookhaven Monument Company, presented the drawings that became the 14-foot-wide and 8-foot-tall, black granite monument with Lynyrd Skynyrd pictures and information about the band and crash displayed on both sides.

A small marker was placed at Southwest Regional Medical Center hospital at McComb, Mississippi, on December 18th, 2019, in dedication of the treatment given to the plane crash survivors. The monument is located just off I-55, Exit 8, Hwy 568 West. Go west 8 miles, until you see the other marker sign, telling you to turn on Easley Road, memorial is then 400 yards