

PROPELLING WHAT'S POSSIBLE FOR THE GULF SOUTH

HANCOCK COUNTY PORT & HARBOR COMMISSION
2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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A LETTER FROM OUR CEO



Friends from around Hancock County,

Last year, we published our first annual report to share our priorities and progress in our continued commitment to push Hancock County and the Mississippi Gulf Coast forward. Today, we're proud to say that we've continued work that aligns with our Strategic Plan and focuses on capacity for infrastructure, marketing, site development, and our regional partnerships.

Just this year, Port Bienville held a groundbreaking ceremony for our largest railroad expansion in over two decades, which will be completed in August 2024. We were also awarded another federal grant for our \$14.6M Intermodal Yard project. Construction for this will likely begin in 2026, bringing our total railroad capacity to more than 800 railcars and more than doubling our rated capacity over a five-year period.

Warehouse construction, the addition of a new well and tank, and road improvements are all under construction as well. Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission was just awarded additional funds to extend utilities and permit approximately 475 acres at Site 1 on the South Road. Point 8 Power, announced last year, is now in production and has brought new investments and jobs to the area. Additionally, we welcomed The Spaceport Company to base their operations and vessels on our dock facilities at Port Bienville.

Skydweller Aero Inc. established a base of operations at Stennis International Airport, housing the world's largest unmanned aerial system, and cut the ribbon on their temporary hangar. Meanwhile, at Stennis Technology Park, we are busy improving roads and developing additional pad-ready sites. Thanks to crucial state support and grant awards, we will continue to build taxiway extensions and apron expansions to support future hangar development.

Things are lifting off at Stennis Space Center, too, with exciting incoming companies like Evolution Space. Their team announced they will be locating future manufacturing operations for solid rocket propulsion motors further growing the defense sector in Hancock County.

But the good news doesn't stop at manufacturing, aerospace, and logistics. We have announced new hotel and commercial development projects in partnership with our local cities on key corridors. Additionally, we have launched new marketing initiatives to update our website, site marketing materials, and lead generation strategies for targeted industries such as defense, aerospace, data centers, and advanced manufacturing.

Our entire team remains committed to overcoming today's challenges—building momentum that brings new opportunities for the whole region. We have taken a more proactive approach to workforce development with our key partners, school districts, and existing industries. Our brightest and busiest days lie ahead, and we are prepared to embrace these hurdles for the betterment of Hancock County and Coastal Mississippi.

Sincerely,

Blaine LaFontaine

Blaine LaFontaine
Executive Director/CEO
Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission

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NEW HIRES & RETIREMENTS

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

AMBER HINTON

Our team is proud to welcome Ms. Amber Hinton, who joins HCPHC with 17 years of experience in governmental accounting and finance from the City of Picayune and the City of Gulfport. As our new Director of Finance, she will direct all finance operations of our commission, including the management of top-level payroll and human resource responsibilities for her department.

“With the continued growth and new prospects we’re seeing, the potential is really endless for Hancock County. I’m thrilled to be a part of what we’re building here and getting to use my expertise to help the commission in any way I can.” – Amber Hinton, Director of Finance of HCPHC

She is a lifelong resident of Southern Mississippi, and her deep connection to the area fuels her passion to help push Hancock County forward with precise financial oversight.



HAPPY RETIREMENT, ELLEN CEASER!

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF SERVICE TO OUR COMMISSION

Affectionately known as the “Keeper of All Things,” Ms. Ellen Ceaser joined our staff in 1999 within accounts receivable before eventually becoming accounting supervisor where she spent most of her career overseeing accounts payable and processing payroll. Working with numbers—checking and rechecking for accuracy—is something Ellen truly enjoyed throughout her multi-decade career. On top of that, she loved working with her fellow employees.

From the entire team at HCPHC, we give heartfelt thanks to Ms. Ceaser for 25 years of passion, loyalty and service to the Commission as well as the State’s Public Employees Retirement System.

A BRIGHT FUTURE IS ON THE HORIZON

At Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission, we know that real results come from combining the right people and resources at the right moments of opportunity. During the space age revolution—a time that pushed the human race to reach further than ever before—we emerged as a catalyst for business and economic growth, all thanks to local ingenuity and logistical advantages only found through our unique port, air and space footprint.

Strategic access points. Sustainable innovation. Community engagement. An empowered workforce. By aligning these, we're able to propel established enterprises towards unrivaled success.

Elsewhere, breakthroughs happen unexpectedly ... if they happen at all. Here, every move is made with intention and backed by expertise that isn't afraid to hit the gas, venture into the unknown, and create something truly legendary. Here's a look at where Hancock County is headed in the coming year—and why you'll definitely want to come along for the ride.



LEADING FROM THE LAND, SEA & SKY

STENNIS SPACE CENTER

For our regional economy, Stennis Space Center continues to be a source of growth and revenue. In fact, within a 50-mile radius, Stennis delivers a direct annual economic impact of \$654 million on average each year. By attracting a highly skilled workforce and utilizing the Infinity Center as a powerful educational asset, Stennis is helping ensure the future of Hancock County one new project at a time.

PORT BIENVILLE

Located just minutes from several major interstates and highways, Port Bienville Industrial Park is a true hub of innovation that's powering a cleaner, more convenient world. Today, that impact is evident through the products manufactured here, such as SNF's water-soluble polymers—recognized as the world's premier choice for industrial and wastewater treatments.

In addition to manufacturing, Port Bienville serves as an integral connector for shipping and logistics. From reliable rail service to waterway access, we help close the loop between regional and global markets by ensuring every product reaches its destination on time and intact.

JULY 2022 – JUNE 2023

8,108

loaded railcars switched at PBVR

270

docked barges in Port Bienville

JULY 2023 – JUNE 2024

9,378

loaded railcars switched at PBVR

356

docked barges in Port Bienville

STENNIS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT & AIRPARK

As an international point of entry to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Stennis International Airport & Airpark boldly welcomes global partnerships with expertise and high-value incentives. Currently, our Airpark covers more than 1,800 contiguous acres with ample room for expansion. Its proximity to the Stennis International Airport ensures convenient access to air travel with a runway equipped to handle the world's largest aircraft with non-stop, all-weather service.

Our partners enjoy easy access to Mississippi Highway 603 and I-10, while our Foreign Trade Zone designation provides streamlined and cost-effective transit and shipping options to a worldwide consumer base.

JAN 2024 – JUNE 2024

22,793

total operations

OCT 2023 – JUNE 2024

9,378

total landings

FORWARD PROGRESS >>>

NEW FUNDING ACCELERATES PORT BIENVILLE INTERMODAL EXPANSION PROJECT

The U.S. Department of Transportation recently awarded Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission \$7.32 million in Transportation-Housing & Urban Development funding as part of the FY24 appropriations bill. This significant funding is specifically designated for the Port Bienville Railroad Intermodal Expansion Project.

The Port Bienville Intermodal Expansion Project, with a total budget of \$25.4 million, is a critical initiative aimed at enhancing rail infrastructure and addressing key challenges faced by the Port Bienville Railroad (PBVR) and existing industries. We have now received full funding to build Phase 1, which involves the construction of a seven-track classification yard.

This yard will significantly increase rail storage capacity, accommodating an additional 220 railcars. The increased capacity will allow the PBVR to better serve its existing tenants and create opportunities for future developments in regional transient storage or new industry. The project is proceeding with engineering and environmental processes, and we plan to see construction begin in 2026.



PHASE 1 \$14.6 million

With the construction of a seven-track classification yard, we will significantly increase rail storage capacity, accommodating an additional 220 railcars. The increased capacity will allow the PBVR to better serve its existing tenants and create opportunities for future developments.

PHASE 2 \$10.8 million

With the development of a truck-to-rail intermodal facility, this phase will connect trucking operations to the rail network, enhance efficiency and promote multimodal transportation options in the region.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM AROUND HANCOCK COUNTY

BREAKING GROUND FOR PORT BIENVILLE RAILROAD STORAGE YARD

On Wednesday, November 15, 2023, our staff—along with local officials and industry representatives—ushered in the new Port Bienville Railroad Storage Yard in Bay Saint Louis. The Port Bienville Railroad Storage Yard represents one of the most substantial investments by HCPHC into the railroad in many years.

Extending capacity from 450 cars to 600 cars, the Port Bienville Railroad Storage Yard expansion will enable HCPHC to more effectively cater to current tenants and create prospects for future developments in regional transient storage.

In addition to the immediate safety and demand benefits, the Port Bienville Railroad Storage Yard project will allow Port Bienville plants to increase production. This gives us the ability to market the increased rail capacity to companies looking for opportunities in the region. The Port Bienville Railroad Storage Yard construction is anticipated to conclude by early fall 2024.



This project represents a new milestone in Port Bienville and Hancock County as the largest investment in our railroad in over two decades. It will increase our capacity—allowing us to better serve our tenant demand, improve safety and efficiency for our employees, and provide opportunities for transient storage regionally.

BLAINE LAFONTAINE
Executive Director/CEO of HCPHC



HIGHLIGHTS FROM AROUND HANCOCK COUNTY

STATE FUNDING ADVANCES SITE DEVELOPMENT

With the announcement of a \$450,000 investment grant from the Mississippi Development Authority, Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission received the funding needed to advance the development requirements for Site #1 at Port Bienville. Site #1 at Port Bienville consisted of 475 acres and served as a premier location for potential industrial development in South Mississippi.

Through the site development grant, Port Bienville received \$450,000 for a wastewater capacity study, pre-engineering to increase wastewater capacity, and engineering and design to permit Site #1 for new industry at Port Bienville. This funding not only helped identify needs for wastewater infrastructure and perform necessary design work to permit our wetlands—it also encouraged businesses to establish their presence in Mississippi for years to come.

PORT BIENVILLE EARNS THIRD CONSECUTIVE JAKE SAFETY AWARD

The American Short Line Railroad Association (ASLRRA) has awarded Port Bienville Short Line Railroad the “Jake with Distinction” Safety Award for its third year. The Jake Safety Award, a symbol of safety standards and outstanding achievements in small railroads, was inspired by the remarkable success of Lowell S. “Jake” Jacobson, the former manager of the Copper Basin Railway. In 1993, his small railroad achieved a perfect safety score. This feat led the ASLRRA to establish an award that acknowledges the highly competitive nature of small rail lines and the need to enhance safety standards.

Today, the “Jake” Safety Awards are presented to the safest railroads that have surpassed the injury frequency rates of the Class II and Class III industry averages reported by the Federal Railroad Administration. Since its establishment in 1995, the Jake Award program has awarded nearly 6,600 Jake and Jake with Distinction Awards to small railroad communities in America.

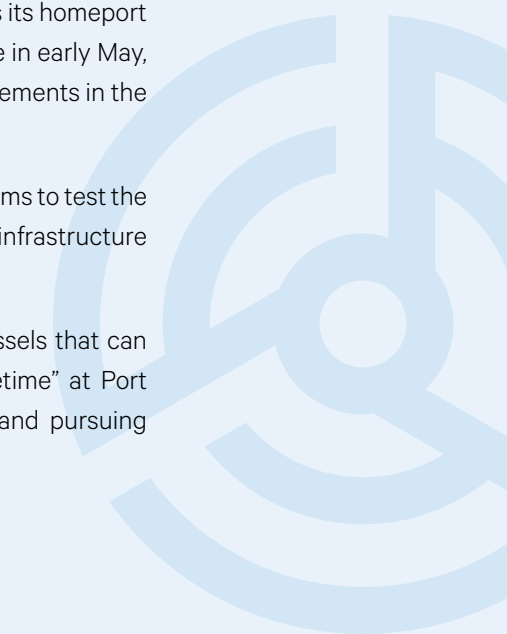


SEA-TO-SKY OPERATIONS LAUNCH IN HANCOCK COUNTY

Here, even the sky isn't the limit for what's possible. The Spaceport Company—known for producing vessels that launch space-bound rockets from sea—recently selected Port Bienville as its homeport for operations. Among their vessels is the “Once in a Lifetime,” which began work here in early May, marking a significant milestone in the company's expansion and technological advancements in the space industry.

Having recently signed a contract with the U.S. Department of Defense, the company aims to test the autonomous capabilities of their vessels, demonstrate new sea-based space launch infrastructure and ultimately deliver payloads to custom orbits.

In response to high demand, the Spaceport Company is actively developing new vessels that can serve as both launch and reentry sites. For now, the placement of “Once in a Lifetime” at Port Bienville is a testament to the company's commitment to meeting market needs and pursuing further growth in a resourceful region.



“

The Spaceport Company is excited and grateful to establish Port Bienville as our homeport. We look forward to many more launches in the coming years from the Gulf.

TOM MAROTTA
CEO of the Spaceport Company

”

HIGHLIGHTS FROM AROUND HANCOCK COUNTY

WAVELAND WELCOMES HARBOR FREIGHT

Harbor Freight, a retailer specializing in tools and equipment, began expanding its retail presence in early 2024 with a new location in Waveland along Highway 90. Harbor Freight was first introduced to the Hancock County market by Retail Strategies in their effort to identify and recruit new businesses to the area.

“I am delighted to welcome Harbor Freight to our community. The opening of the new store marks an exciting addition to our local business landscape. The Hwy 90 and Hwy 603 intersection is the most traveled intersection of Hancock County. The addition of Harbor Freight at this location increases the attractiveness of this area to all shoppers. This investment by Harbor Freight not only creates jobs for our residents but also provides convenient access to quality tools and equipment for both professionals and DIY enthusiasts. We look forward to a long and prosperous relationship with Harbor Freight as they contribute to the continued growth and development of our community.”

– Mayor Jay Trapani



DUAL-BRAND HOTEL DEVELOPMENT MAKES WAVES

Celebrating Waveland’s first new hotel investment in over two decades, the July 2024 groundbreaking ceremony for the \$16 million dual-brand Marriott hotel marked the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the city. This unique hotel concept will feature both Fairfield and TownePlace Suites, offering 110 rooms, 55 rooms dedicated to Fairfield, and 55 rooms to TownePlace Suites.

As the economic development authority for the county, the Hancock County Port & Harbor Commission was proud to support the collaborative efforts with Waveland Hospitality, LLC and the City of Waveland to place this hotel project in their city. Due to the extensive planning by the hotel developer, the project is ready to begin construction immediately.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM AROUND HANCOCK COUNTY

STENNIS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT'S NORTH APRON HEADS FOR NEW HEIGHTS

The friendly skies around Hancock County are growing thanks to a new \$3 million grant from the Mississippi Department of Transportation's Strategic Multimodal Investments Fund to support the Stennis International Airport's North Apron Expansion Project. This extension will create additional parking space for aircraft and improve safety by enhancing aircraft staging and taxi flow efficiency.



This \$3 million award was one of \$30 million in grant awards designated for intermodal transportation projects statewide. In a snapshot, the Stennis International Airport's North Apron Expansion Project represents a significant investment in Hancock County's aviation infrastructure—one that will foster economic growth and support our defense industry well into the future.



SKYDWELLER AERO OPENS NEW TEMPORARY HANGAR

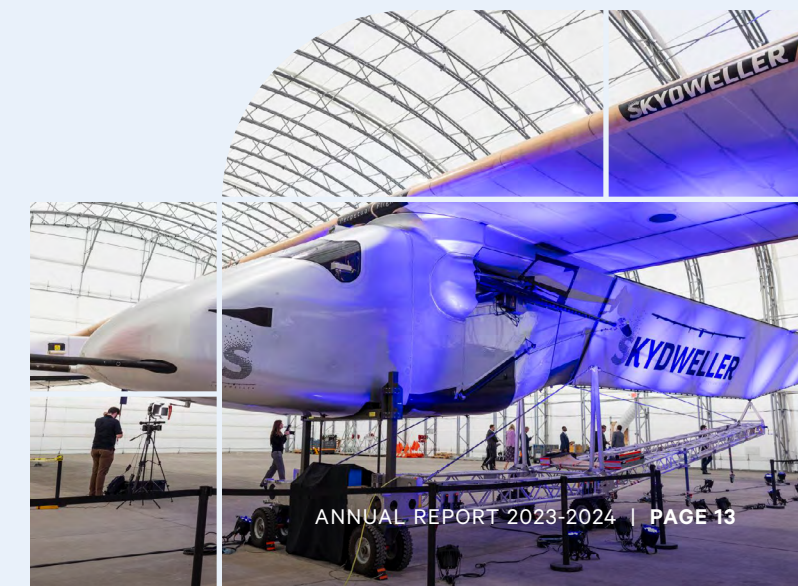
In collaboration with Skydweller Aero, Hancock County Port & Harbor Commission hosted a ribbon cutting for the company's new temporary hangar at Stennis International Airport. Local and state officials along with workforce partners joined in to celebrate the beginning of an exciting new chapter in aerospace innovation and economic development.

This ceremony marks an important milestone for Skydweller Aero to establish its test flight operations at Stennis International Airport. This includes a flight testing command and control center, and an aircraft modification facility. The company is also actively collaborating with state academic institutions, including Mississippi State University, Mississippi Polymer Institute, and University of Southern Mississippi.

The welcome Mississippi has shown Skydweller has been incredible. We are hopeful that this is the beginning of a long-term relationship that supports US national defense and the defense of our allies.

DAVID TYLER
Skydweller US Stennis Operations Director

Their new operations will bring up to 36 new high-tech jobs. As Skydweller Aero passes this new development milestone, Hancock County continues to be the cornerstone of Mississippi's aerospace industry.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM AROUND HANCOCK COUNTY

RS-25 CERTIFICATION TESTING COMPLETE FOR ARTEMIS V AND BEYOND

After successfully completing 45 development tests and 24 certification tests at NASA's Stennis Space Center, Aerojet Rocketdyne and NASA have finished all hot-fire tests required to certify new versions of the RS-25 engine for the agency's SLS (Space Launch System) rocket. These engines will be used on Artemis missions starting with the fifth flight of SLS.

Since the RS-25 successfully powered 135 previous shuttle flights, the team knew they had a solid design that was reliable for astronaut-carrying missions. The new engines will operate at 111% of rated thrust level on SLS—an increase from the shuttle program, where they ran at 104.5%.

Four Aerojet Rocketdyne RS-25 engines, generating more than 2 million pounds of combined liquid-propulsion thrust, help to power the core stage of the SLS at launch. The first four SLS missions are utilizing RS-25 engines remaining from NASA's Space Shuttle Program that have been refurbished and outfitted with modern flight computers and avionics.



SOLID ROCKET MOTOR DEVELOPMENT COMING TO NASA STENNIS

This past October, NASA's Stennis Space Center joined with Evolution Space to announce that the aerospace company would establish production and testing operations for solid rocket motors onsite. The announcement grants access for Evolution Space to establish its Minor Scale Propulsion Center, while also opening the door to a larger future presence at the center. It also marks the first time in NASA Stennis' 62-year history that the site would support production and testing of solid rocket motors.

Under the arrangement, Evolution Space gains access to previously vacant NASA Stennis facilities to mix, cast, and store propellants. It also will use the E-3 Test Complex at NASA Stennis to conduct solid rocket motor hot fires onsite for the first time. The company's production facility is expected to be operational by spring 2025.

This news represents the latest collaboration between NASA Stennis and a commercial aerospace company. The nation's largest propulsion test site, NASA Stennis features a secure setting and 125,000-acre acoustical buffer zone that enables 365/24/7 operations and testing.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM AROUND HANCOCK COUNTY

JOHN BAILEY NAMED STENNIS SPACE CENTER DIRECTOR

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson recently named John Bailey as the agency's new director of Stennis Space Center. A communications engineer with the U.S. Air Force, Bailey led electronic communications testing worldwide. He joined the NASA Stennis team in 1999 and subsequently served in a variety of roles, managing and leading technical and non-technical organizations and supervising employees with a wide range of skills and backgrounds.

Bailey was tapped in 2015 to lead the NASA Stennis Engineering and Test Directorate, managing critical rocket propulsion test assets exceeding \$2 billion in value and projects more than \$221 million in value. He was then named NASA Stennis associate director in 2018 and selected as the center's deputy director in 2021.

Today, NASA Stennis Space Center is a unique federal city, home to more than 50 resident tenants with a combined workforce of over 5,200. The center is expanding as an aerospace and technology hub, and in development of intelligent and autonomous systems needed for deep space exploration.



So much of NASA runs through Stennis. It is where we hone new and exciting capabilities in aerospace, technology, and deep space exploration. I am confident that John will lead the nation's largest and premier propulsion test site to even greater success.

BILL NELSON
NASA Administrator



THE NUMBERS

PROJECT TITLE	BUDGET	GRANT AMOUNT	% COMPLETE
SINGLE GA HANGAR	\$927,950	\$134,484	100%
JALBTCX	\$7,458,395	\$6,600,000	10%
TECH PARK PHASE II	\$3,223,467	\$2,000,000	35%
WASTEWATER CAPACITY STUDY	\$150,000	—	36%
FRED HAISE ROAD EXTENSION	\$1,343,148	—	6%
SITE DEVELOPMENT - TECHNOLOGY PARK	\$100,000	\$50,000	7%
NORTH APRON JOINT SEAL REPAIR	\$264,000	—	100%
SITE 2 APRON EXPANSION	\$3,300,000	\$3,000,000	10%
AIRPORT SUBTOTAL	\$16,766,960	\$11,784,483.80	
BARGE FLEETING AREA	\$893,324	\$502,855	100%
WAREHOUSE 3	\$3,235,709	\$2,000,000	80%
PORT BIENVILLE UTILITY EXTENSION TO SITE 1	\$2,260,000	\$1,749,220	6%
SITE DEVELOPMENT - SITE 1	\$500,000	\$450,000	59%
SITE DEVELOPMENT - SITE 11	\$100,000	\$50,000	60%
PORT SUBTOTAL	\$7,389,033	\$5,308,245	
STORAGE YARD	\$6,438,245	\$4,140,000	75%
INTERMODAL YARD	\$14,600,000	\$10,670,000	8%
RAILROAD SUBTOTAL	\$21,038,245	\$14,810,000	
TOTAL	\$45,194,238	\$31,902,728	

POWERING UP OUR WORKFORCE >>>

CONNECTING INDUSTRY TO THE NEXT GENERATION: CAREER COACHES VISIT PORT BIENVILLE INDUSTRIAL PARK

At the beginning of 2024, HCPHC welcomed high school career coaches from Hancock, Pearl River, and Harrison Counties to tour Port Bienville Industrial Park. During their visit, the coaches toured Point 8 Power, Alpek Polyester, and SABIC to gain valuable insights into each industry and their respective workforces.

Port Bienville Industrial Park marked the first stop on a three-part series of industry tours that career coaches participated in to improve youth mentorship for the manufacturing sectors located in Hancock County. The goal of these tours is to help each coach better understand and connect with our industries to find resources and future career opportunities for their students.



As it stands, high school career coaches continue to play a crucial role in the enhancement of workforce development in Hancock County. Our team is eager to further nurture the bonds between our community and the industrial sector through future educational opportunities like these.



CREATING PROGRESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Hancock County is committed to ensuring education directly addresses the evolving demands of today's and tomorrow's industries. We are actively shaping a workforce equipped with the in-demand skills necessary to drive economic growth and innovation by creating new relationships between educators and local industries.

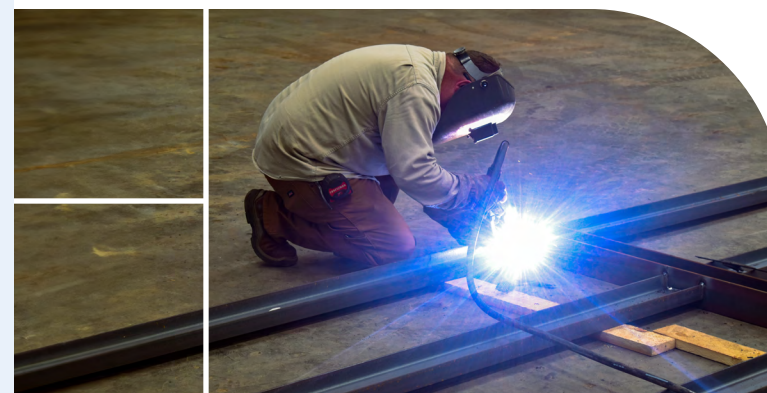
Led by the Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission, the Hancock County Workforce Partners Meeting creates a forum for existing industry to openly discuss workforce challenges and needs with our local educators. By bridging the gap between schools and the workplace, we are creating a dynamic workforce that propels the county's economic success.

PEARL RIVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE HANCOCK AVIATION AEROSPACE WORKFORCE ACADEMY

With construction started in February 2023, the new Hancock Aviation Aerospace Workforce Academy at Pearl River Community College (PRCC) is projected to begin offering classes in August 2024. Located right next door to Stennis International Airport and the Hancock High School Career & Technical Center, this academy will provide skilled workforce development for both aviation and aerospace industries.

Specifically, the PRCC Hancock Aviation Aerospace Workforce Academy is designed to be multi-functional with versatility to fit the evolving needs and growth of our region. With 36,000 square feet of training space and a 18,000 square foot hangar, our next generation will be able to stay on the forefront of research and innovative technologies.

Currently, Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission's Aviation and Aerospace Cluster Optimization Plan estimates a demand of 582 aerospace related jobs. As Stennis International Airport expands its capacity to bring more aerospace, aviation and other industry clients to Hancock County, our partnership with PRCC will be essential to meeting the growing workforce demand.



EVENTS & CONFERENCES



Airport Appreciation Luncheon



Career Coach Tour at NASA Stennis Space Center



State of the County



Skydweller Aero Ribbon Cutting



Long Beach High School Career Fair



Space Symposium



Pearlington Library Trunk or Treat



Career Coach Tour at Port Bienville



Port Appreciation Luncheon



CASA Touch a Truck Event



Industry Visit to Aerojet Rocketdyne



Accelerate MS Visits Hancock County



State of the Coast



Point 8 Power Ribbon Cutting



Space Day in the Bay



Railroad Storage Yard Groundbreaking