

# Connor Industries Locating Operations in Coahoma County

## Boat Manufacturer Creating Fifty-Six Jobs



From STAFF REPORTS

Canadian-based boat manufacturer, Connor Industries, is locating operations in Clarksdale—and it's huge news. The project represents a corporate investment of at least \$8 million and will create fifty-six high-paying jobs. A formal announcement was made at a special ceremony on the campus of Coahoma Community College on Friday, May 17. The company, which manufactures welded aluminum fire, rescue, and police boats under the Stanley brand, announced their plans to expand production into the United States by building a new plant on 53 acres in north Coahoma County.

Plant construction is expected to begin within the next several months.

Connor Industries' new location will enable the company to manufacture and test boats year-round on the Mississippi River. The project involves the construction of a new 48,600-square-foot facility to house Connor Industries' new Clarksdale operations, as well as public infrastructure improvements in north Coahoma County, including the construction of a new road over the Mississippi River levee and a river dock landing.

The Mississippi Development Authority is providing assistance for site development and infrastructure improvements. Substantive



additional support is being provided through grants from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and Delta Regional Authority.

Connor Industries' product line includes welded aluminum commercial, luxury and emergency response vessels. The company expects to complete construction next year and plans to fill the 56 jobs shortly after completion.

While Connor Industries has purchased the land and will build



team I would assemble to discuss the owner's needs and interests," says Levingston. "That team included attorney Ted Connell; Terry Smith, surveyor and senior partner in the firm Smith Weiland; and James Curcio, executive director of the North Delta Planning and Development District."

What Levingston and his team learned on the call was that owner and CEO Bill Connor wanted to expand his 35 year old operation into the United States to accommodate his growing business. He was also interested in a warm water port, as the current plants are located in Parry Sound, Ontario. The port water there freezes for several months in most years.

At the end of the Zoom call, Levingston invited Connor to travel to Mississippi, which he agreed to do as soon as travel restrictions were lifted. In the meantime, Levingston and his team began to scout possible sites to locate a new plant. Following several months of research, the team located potential sites they were prepared to recommend.

When the pandemic eased in the fall of 2021, Connor travelled to Clarksdale. Levingston set up a series of meetings with local officials, representatives of state agencies, and others. A few weeks later, Levingston travelled to Parry Sound to tour the manufacturing facilities there.

"I have never seen a cleaner manufacturing plant. The whole place hummed with efficiency and everyone I met was friendly and seemed so pleased to be employed by Connor Industries," says Levingston.

"Even more," he notes, "I came to regard Bill Connor as a classic creative entrepreneur who has an idea, realizes the idea through remarkable diligence and hard work, and then continues repeatedly to refine that idea until it becomes a product so compelling that people buy it even if they have to wait a year or two before they can take possession."

Connor Industries began in 1992, and has grown to a multi-million dollar producer of welded aluminum fire, police, and rescue boats under the Stanley brand name.

In 2022, Bill Connor purchased fifty-three acres of land in north Coahoma County, bordered on the west by Highway 1, and the south by Seepwater Road. He then took bids to construct a 50,000 square foot plant. In 2023, Connor chose Malouf Construction as the builder.

Connor states, "This project has required a complex set of calculations to determine the best site for our plant and we have had to negotiate with many agencies to see this process to the point that

the plant, Coahoma County plans to build a road from the plant over the levee to the river and a ramp from which Connor Industries will be able to launch their vessels. The County has received four grants totaling approximately \$4.7 million to fund the construction of the road as well as improvements to a nearby road adjacent to the plant property. Grants included approximately \$2.2 million from the Delta Regional Authority, approximately \$2.1 million from the Economic Development Administration of the US Commerce Department, and \$400,000 from the State of Mississippi.

Connor Industries' financial contribution to the project will exceed \$8 million.

"We are thrilled to create new economic opportunities for the citizens of Coahoma County and the entire northwest Delta region. We are grateful to all those in local, state and the federal U.S. government who have helped in the recruitment and funding of infrastructure necessary for Connor Industries to expand into Coahoma County, Mississippi. We are excited for the growth opportunities for our company represented by this expansion," said Connor Industries Founder and CEO, Bill Connor, who was on hand at the event.

"So, what began with a Zoom call during the darkest days of the pandemic in March 2021, resulted in the announcement that a new manufacturing facility would be built on fifty-three acres of land in north Coahoma County, in which welded aluminum fire, police, and rescue boats would be constructed and sold throughout North America and the Caribbean," says Jon Levingston, the economic developer and executive of the Crossroads Economic Partnership in Clarksdale.

"When I received word in early 2021 that Connor Industries was interested in building a plant near a warm water port, I reached out by phone to determine if the owner would be willing to meet with a



**Levingston**



**Espy**

we could make an announcement and plan to begin construction. However, I must say that Jon and the team he assembled navigated us safely through every step of the way. I have rarely seen a more diligent, determined and hard working group of people. I am so impressed with the Coahoma County team and so very grateful to them.”

Clarksdale Mayor Chuck Espy states, “We have enjoyed an unusual amount of success during the past few years in attracting new industry to our community. Connor Industries is certainly one of the most desirable companies any community would want to have. We are honored and grateful to Bill Connor that he would choose our county in which to locate his business. That choice reflects his faith in our people and our workforce. Our city pledges everything we can do to make sure that Bill lands safely and profitably in our area.”

Economic Development Authority Vice President, Hartley Kittle, comments that “I have been involved in economic development projects in Coahoma County for over 25 years. I have never witnessed or been a part of any recruitment effort that has resulted in a stronger or more dynamic industry committing their considerable resources to

Coahoma County in the past six years. Additionally, the community has recently begun the construction of a new call center for the Internal Revenue Service that will bring fifty new jobs to downtown Clarksdale in the fall of 2024.

“Connor Industries’ new location in Coahoma County is another reminder of the incredible variety of resources that our state has to offer. This significant private-sector investment will bring new opportunities to the people of Coahoma County that, in turn, will strengthen the area’s economy through local spending and a stronger tax base. I welcome Connor Industries to our great state, and I wish the company many years of success in the Mississippi Delta,” stated Governor Tate Reeves.

Mississippi Development Authority Executive Director, Bill Cork, stated “Each new economic development win is great news for our local communities and the entire state. Mississippi touts its pro-business policies to companies around the globe, and Connor Industries’ decision to locate in Coahoma County is a fantastic reminder that companies outside our state are increasingly looking



**Front row left to right; Otha Williams, Levee Board; Bo Plunk, City Commissioner; Jon Levingston, Executive Director, Economic Development Authority; Meghan Connor; Alison Connor; LaShasa Griffin, Delta Regional Authority; Johnny Newson, former president Board of Supervisors; Roosevelt Lee, former Supervisor. Back row: Will young, Supervisor; Jimmy Harris, City Commissioner; Bill Crump, field rep, Office of Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith; Hartley Kittle, Vice President, EDA Board; Bill Cork, executive director, Mississippi Development Authority; Pat Davis, President, Board of Supervisors; Bill Connor, CEO, Connor Industries; State Representative Orlando Paden; Willie Turner, City Commissioner; Steven Jossell, executive director, Workforce Development Center**

our community. Nor have I ever seen so many members of our community, region, state, and nation partnering so seamlessly with us to make this project so successful.”

“The formal announcement that Connor Industries would locate in Coahoma County took place on Friday, May 17, at the Pinnacle Building on the campus of Coahoma Community College,” says Levingston, recapping the historic announcement. “Over 300 people attended, representing local residents, local and state elected officials, as well as members of local, state, and regional agencies who had an interest in the project. It was a major event and a day in which everyone had the opportunity to celebrate a community, state, and nation joining forces to bring economic opportunity and new jobs to a community in the northwest Delta region.”

The doors of the new plant are planned to open by the summer of 2025. A minimum of fifty-six people will be hired to produce new boats in the facility. The company will invest a minimum of \$8 million in the plant and equipment.

Connor Industries joins Image Industries, a steel manufacturing company formerly based in Chicago, and PeopleShores, an outsource center formerly based in San Jose, California, that have moved to

here for business opportunities.”

“We’re thrilled to be part of the project and of the impact it will have on the Mississippi Delta, where we have strong business and family roots,” says George Malouf, Jr., Pre-construction Manager for Malouf Construction, the design-build general contractor for the project. “It has been a pleasure working with Bill and his staff to design a new facility to meet their needs.”

“Our county is grateful that Bill Connor wishes to locate here. We pledge our support to help him become among the most successful businesses in our state. We are grateful for the state and federal support necessary to make this project possible. We look forward to the new jobs Connor Industries will create for our citizens and the significant benefits those jobs will have on our local economy,” added Coahoma County Board of Supervisors President, Pat Davis.

Connor Industries, under the trademark brand name Stanley stanleyboats.ca, specializes in welded aluminum commercial vessels, servicing federal, state, and local governments’ needs for superior marine response vessels. The company was founded by Bill Connor over thirty-five years ago, with its headquarters located in Parry Sound, Ontario, Canada. **DBJ**