



# Image Industries

## Operations Underway in Clarksdale

By MARK H. STOWERS

Image Industries, a Chicago steel manufacturing business, moved their entire operations to Clarksdale this past summer to the former Metso Minerals site. Owners Blake and Stacia Hobson, the brother/sister team, made the announcement this past July along with Economic Development Authority Director Jon Levingston, Mayor Chuck Espy and Board of Supervisors President Paul Pearson.

“They are leasing the 142,500-square foot facility formerly occupied by Metso,” says Levingston. “They moved a great deal of their equipment to Clarksdale and began operation in Clarksdale in September for several of their customers.”

Co-owner Blake Hobson cited an exhaustive search to find a more business friendly atmosphere that brought Image Industries from the Windy City to the

Mississippi Delta. And his meeting the residents and business owners of the area sealed the deal for the Hobsons.

“Illinois has become a business unfriendly state and we began a nationwide search and narrowed it down and narrowed it down with Clarksdale being the best place for it,” says Hobson. “One of the biggest things that had to do with it was the people. We have never met more warm, welcoming people in all of our lives and that was a significant deciding factor for us.”

Hobson has moved to the area and is “glad to be there and the employees that we’ve found have been really great. Their hearts are in the right place and they are learning quickly. Illinois didn’t care about

us but in Clarksdale, we are making a real difference from a corporate citizen perspective and that feels good to us.”

Image Industries using the cold forming process to economically produce hundreds of custom parts per minute, such as threaded weld studs, shear connectors and concrete anchors, hydraulic weld ports and cable management studs.

The move was expected to be finished by the end of November. The company was created by the Hobson’s father, Stephen, in 1975. The business is a technology driven leader in the design and manufacture of stud welding equipment and has service clients across the United States. Levingston’s and local leaders’ attentions were steered toward



Levingston





Image Industries by other Magnolia State organizations.

"The company, which was introduced to us through the outstanding Delta Strong program of Delta Council, received great support from the State of Mississippi through two grants from the Mississippi Development Authority," says Levingston. "We are so grateful to the great team at the Mississippi Development Authority for working with us in recruiting this Illinois industry to Clarksdale."

Delta Workforce Development Area and the South Delta Planning District also provided grants to support workforce training for Image Industries. The North Delta Planning District manages the



**Hobson**

MDA grants and provides counsel to Levingston's team. The "new" business will impact the Clarksdale economy significantly according to Levingston.

"They initially bring between their own investment and state and regional investment over \$4,000,000 to the community," says Levingston. "To that, one would add the economic impact of a minimum of fifty jobs."

Levingston noted, "According to Jobs E Q, the premier provider of economic jobs data, the total direct and indirect economic impact that Image will have in Clarksdale will be about \$10,000,000 per year. This impact is in addition to the grants and corporate investment initially made by

the company, as well as state and regional agencies. We welcome the owners, Blake and Stacia Hobson, to Clarksdale and look forward to the growth and development of their outstanding business in our community," Levingston says.

The Hobsons are excited about the opportunity afforded them in the Mississippi Delta.

"Image Industries is excited to be relocating to Clarksdale, Mississippi. Not only are the city of Clarksdale, the Mississippi Development Authority and the state providing a business-friendly environment where Image Industries can grow and prosper, but the community as a whole has been very welcoming. To a person, everyone has greeted us with open arms," says Image Industries Co-owner Hobson. "The local community



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college and workforce development team have jumped into action to develop the specialized cold forming job training programs that Image Industries requires. This ensures Image Industries will have the proper skilled workforce when our operations begin. All these factors have given my sister and co-owner Stacia and me the confidence to relocate Image Industries to Clarksdale."

The Mississippi Development Authority is providing assistance for equipment relocation and building improvements, as well as a loan to the county for the purchase of the building and building improvements. The company also qualifies for the Growth and Prosperity program, which offers an exemption on all state income and franchise taxes related to the new location and an exemption on all equipment and machinery purchased for the initial building renovations.

"Skilled trade jobs are the backbone of our nation's economy, as millions of workers produce top-quality products every day that keep industries across the country thriving in today's global marketplace," said Governor Phil Bryant in a press release. "Mississippi is a strong manufacturing state, and I know Image Industries' fifty new employees also will work hard to ensure the company remains competitive and achieves long-term success at its new location in the Delta."

MDA Executive Director Glenn McCullough, Jr. notes the move by Image continues to strengthen the manufacturing sector in the Mississippi Delta.

"By locating in Clarksdale, Image Industries joins the ranks of leading manufacturers that have shaped the industry in Mississippi to be one of the strongest in the country, creating a highly skilled workforce dedicated to ensuring companies achieve their goals in our state," said McCullough. "We salute the teams at the Clarksdale-Coahoma Chamber of Commerce and Delta Strong for working together with MDA to bring Image Industries' investment, to our state, creating fifty exciting new career opportunities in the Mississippi Delta." **DBJ**

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