

AIB Means Business in Brewton, Alabama

By Linda Cromer, AIB Judge



Brewton, Alabama is a model of the pride and progress that typifies America in Bloom communities. Participating in the AIB program since 2014, Brewton demonstrates that when it comes to making America in Bloom work for a community, “taking care of business” the AIB way provides opportunities for businesses to take care of you.



When Frontier Manufacturing and Engineering Technologies (headquartered in Long Beach, California) started looking in summer 2016 for a production center to serve a Pensacola, Florida GE plant, contestants started lining up. Frontier manufactures high-tech aerospace, energy and architectural components and was looking for a location within a 60-mile radius of Pensacola, prioritizing relative privacy to protect proprietary processes and the availability of a quality workforce. After considering candidate communities and working with the Coastal Gateway Economic Development Alliance, Frontier officials visited a spec building in Brewton’s industrial park but instead chose to invest in an adjacent and larger pre-owned 55,000 sq. ft. facility.



Frontier president Steven Hoekstra was quoted in area press saying the purchase represents a \$1.5 million investment and the Brewton site was selected because the city’s “quality of life is great” and the local work ethic “outstanding”. That means 25 new jobs in Brewton with an expectation of 200 within five years. A winning workforce is the direct result of creating communities where talented folks want to live.

Brewton’s burgeoning economic development isn’t unique to the industrial park. Forty-seven properties dating to the 19th and 20th centuries were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, but many sat empty or under-utilized for too many years. Community leaders made a bold move and literally “turned around” a block of empty historic buildings that directly face a noisy, dirty rail track by creating an attractive, accessible boardwalk behind the buildings and essentially recreating new main pedestrian entrances.



Façade-improvement incentives and America in Bloom efforts have enhanced appealing and appropriate new storefronts with lush landscaping and floral displays and there is a steady stream of patrons for bustling businesses. Stroll down the boardwalk and visit a friendly provider to purchase some personal-injury insurance before stepping into a neighboring yoga studio. Unwind yourself from the lotus position and ease on next door for a latte to reward yourself for your exertions. Preparation....perspiration....payoff. Personal and commercial development have a lot in common.

Convenient sidewalks connect the boardwalk to other businesses in the historic district, residential neighborhoods, and recreational facilities. Since financial incentives and America in Bloom-fostered improvements have been encouraging development in the historic district, seven structures have been restored and reused and three more are in the pipeline. Brewton, Alabama, twice named one of the 100 Best Small Towns in America, just keeps on getting better.



Wonderfully preserved, restored and repurposed buildings; state-of-the-art educational facilities; an expansive and expanding park system; attractive horticultural features including floral displays, landscapes, and trees; and a myriad of festivals and community events add up to an enviable quality of life for the residents of Brewton, Alabama. America in Bloom participation has been a vital component in the process.