



Boeing's 787 and Airbus' A380 were both on display at Farnborough.

*Northrop Grumman photo*

## Farnborough: Making the connections

*Highlighting South Mississippi capabilities beyond aerospace in face-to-face meetings can pique interest, and several companies now plan to take a look...*

Larry Barnett wasn't sure what to expect at his scheduled meeting with an aerospace supplier during last month's Farnborough International Airshow. The company agreed to the meeting, but said that if Barnett's schedule was tight, he could cancel. That wasn't too encouraging, he thought.

But during the face-to-face meeting, the conversation turned to how the company is constantly working to improve the properties of its primary

material. That's when Barnett brought up the composite fabrication work at Gulfport's Bernard Bayou Industrial District, polymer science research at the University of Southern Mississippi and advanced manufacturing in the Stennis-Michoud area.

That piqued their interest, and they asked Barnett to send them some more information. Whether anything will come of that meeting is unclear at this juncture, but it points out one reason economic development officials go to

Farnborough. It's a chance to meet with aerospace companies and point out capabilities that might not have been known had it not been for the meeting.

Call it connecting the dots.

### **Making a showing**

Barnett, executive director of the Harrison County Development Commission, was among the South Mississippi delegates at the July 19-25 air show near London. The show lets aerospace companies show off military and commercial products. And for economic development officials it's a chance to highlight their region on a world stage and to build relationships



*Google image/Tcp illustration*

In Mississippi, the coastal region, Jackson, Meridian and Golden Triangle are centers for aerospace.

that could have payoffs down the road.

Farnborough is held every other year. Officials say this year there were 70 delegations from 44 countries, 120,000 trade visitors, 108,000 public visitors, 1,455 exhibitors from 40 countries, 22 international pavilions and eight from the U.K. and 152 aircraft. In addition, 46 companies held 800 meetings with 159 suppliers during the two-day business-to-business sessions, leading to \$47 billion in orders.

The group from South Mississippi had 30 meetings with a variety of companies, as well as non-scheduled talks. Some of the prospects now want additional information about South Mississippi, and several already have scheduled visits.

It's all part of the ongoing effort to elevate the profile of South Mississippi in the aerospace community. The region has been a regular participant at air shows for several years. And as if to underscore that South Mississippi is on the right track, the state for the first time through the Mississippi Development Authority had a pavilion

at Farnborough. It highlighted aerospace activities not only in South Mississippi, but in the Golden Triangle, Meridian and Jackson.

"I couldn't be more pleased with the level of support that the state and MDA exhibited," said George Freeland, executive director of the Jackson County Economic Development Foundation.

"I told (executive director) Gray Swoope and other folks at the MDA that they had a first-class exhibit," said Barnett. "It did bring credibility to our area and what we've done."

### **The assets**

South Mississippi has been promoting its science and technology activities, including aerospace, through the Mississippi Gulf Coast Alliance for Economic Development. The group, formed by economic development organizations in South Mississippi, maintains Web sites that include news digests focusing on aerospace, advanced materials, marine science, geospatial technologies and shipbuilding. It also

produces a quarterly science and technology newsletter, and produces an annual aerospace directory.

The aerospace assets are considerable. South Mississippi is home to NASA's John C. Stennis Space Center, which tests rocket and jet engines and has companies that build aerospace propulsion systems and satellite components. South Mississippi also has a state-of-the-art plant that makes portions of two types of unmanned aerial systems, and two areas approved for UAV flights. There's also a growing commercial airport that hosts a National Guard aerial combat training center and one of the nation's four Army National Guard helicopter repair depots.

Military activities in South Mississippi range from special operations training to electronics training, includes cyber security. Ranges in the Gulf of Mexico and at Camp Shelby, north of Gulfport, attract military from outside the region.

Some of the biggest companies in aerospace have operations in South Mississippi, and there are smaller

## Farnborough at a glance

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**Trade show visitors:** 120,000 over five days  
**Public visitors:** 108,000 over two days  
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**Pavilions:** 22 international, eight UK  
**Delegates:** 70 from 44 countries  
**Aircraft:** 152 static or flying  
**Meetings:** 800 (46 companies 159 suppliers)



Fire Scout and Global Hawk, both built in part in Mississippi, were both on display at Farnborough. *Northrop Grumman photo*

*Farnborough International Airshow*

companies doing innovative work, including clusters of companies creating applications for geospatial technologies and doing work with advanced materials.

State universities have a presence here, and two community colleges provide training.

But for any area, being seen in the crowded field is no small task. One answer is being part of a larger group. And South Mississippi can be seen as a significant aerospace player in three broader regions. It's part of a state that has made aerospace a target, and it's also part of the I-10 corridor between Southeast Louisiana and Northwest Florida.

An even broader approach is taken by a group called the Aerospace Alliance, which includes all of Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana, and the northwest portion of Florida. The Alliance, formed in 2009, hosted a reception for about 400 aerospace executives at Kensington Palace the night before the opening of the air show. The group from Mississippi attended.

### Face-to-face

The face-to-face meetings with prospects are central to the air show visits. Meeting with so many diverse companies at one location is far more efficient than trying to meet them on their home turf.

As in past air shows, the South Mississippi team goes with a list of appointments; some are repeat visits, some are with new prospects. The meetings were arranged by 310 Ltd of Richmond, Va., a marketing company has worked with the group for two shows in Paris, two in London.

For the South Mississippi team, a detailed understanding of the Mississippi Gulf Coast aerospace assets is obviously essential.

Arnie Williams, economic development director of Mississippi Power, said his first meeting was with a company that, among other things, builds unmanned aerial systems. His meeting was with an official that he had met the previous year in Paris.

"As we were going through talking points, I asked if the company had any issues elsewhere," said Williams. Come to find out, the company was dealing with restrictions for flying unmanned systems. The FAA is highly selective about issuing certificates of authorization.

Williams pointed out that Jackson County has a certificate of authorization for UAV flights in and around Trent Lott International Airport in Moss Point. And, said Williams, he also told him about the COA that was issued for an area at Stennis Space Center.

"It was right up their alley," said Williams, who had Freeland come into the meeting to provide more

information on the COA. The company plans to visit South Mississippi in the fall.

But members of the South Mississippi delegation also have to be versed in related activities, the synergies that can provide the competitive advantage, like advanced materials and geospatial technologies. In fact, advanced materials issues came up several times.

Barnett, for example, said he met with one company that already has an operation elsewhere in Mississippi. He wanted to interest them in the southern part of the state.

"The significant thing he told me was that the Gulf region is in a good position for growth in the composites industry," in part because of the international reputation of the Southern Miss' composite activities. That company and another with an operation in the state referenced Southern Miss' polymer science program as being a plus in their business.

Freeland found that many of the discussions went beyond aerospace itself.

"What you find at this show, more so this year, was that these discussions don't contain themselves in the aerospace industry. These are defense contractors, and some companies have interests in other product lines. You find yourself in discussion about broad based product lines," Freeland said.



Photo courtesy MDA

Barnett, Swoope and Freeland at the Mississippi pavilion.

Trying to stay ahead of the curve is also important.

Freeland said his discussions including some specific projects. He had a conversation with one company that's planning to bid on a major military project. Should the company win, it will require additional facilities.

"He seemed as eager to talk to me as I was to talk to him," said Freeland. Although the requests for proposals are not even out yet, Freeland described his meeting as an attempt to "influence the decision before there's a decision to be made."

Not all the meetings were planned.

Williams also had something result from a chance meeting with a former Air Force official who now works for a company involved in geospatial activities. It was at a gathering that

Williams caught sight of the familiar face. They talked for a while, and he's scheduled to come for a visit in the fall.

While economic development officials would love to come away with a specific project, they all know that what they're doing is laying the groundwork for the future. Barnett has said it's like any investment where the payoff is down the road.

"It was our best regional effort yet. I think based on the quality, based on the quantity of the projects and certainly based on the level of support we're receiving from the state," said Freeland.

Success is measured in terms of new locations, jobs and capital investments. But there are also "process" achievements, and one of those can be determined by the number and quality of companies and representatives that put feet on the ground here.

"When we say we're from Mississippi, people recognize us more and more," said Barnett.



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- David Tortorano