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HOW AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPER IS BRINGING FACTORY JOBS BACK TO MISSISSIPPI

Joe Max Higgins is credited with generating about 6,000 manufacturing jobs in Mississippi's Golden Triangle, one of the poorest areas in the country. How's he doing it? Bill Whitaker reports.

2016
DEC 04 CORRESPONDENT
BILL WHITAKER

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The following script is from "The Golden Triangle," which aired on Dec. 4, 2016. Bill Whitaker is the correspondent. Marc Lieberman and Michael Kaplan, producer.

This past week, Donald Trump cut his first deal as president-elect. He leaned on Carrier, the heating and air conditioning company, to keep 1,000 jobs in Indiana from going to Mexico. The company got a generous tax break in return. In the last few decades, America has lost millions of factory jobs offshore. But you might be surprised to learn U.S. manufacturing is showing signs of coming back due to cheap energy, proximity to customers, and a rising cost of labor in China. Nearly a million manufacturing jobs have been created since the Great

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60 Minutes correspondent Bill Whitaker, left, and economic developer Joe Max Higgins / CBS NEWS

If you have heard of the Golden Triangle, it might be because of this: Mississippi State football. Around here, everybody loves the Bulldogs. And "bulldog" is an apt description of the man who runs economic development for the area: Joe Max Higgins. He considers job creation a full contact sport.

Joe Max Higgins: The only way we win any deal is to tear off everybody else's face. We gotta kill everybody to win the deal.

Ferocity is a job requirement. During the recession, unemployment in some parts of the Triangle got as high as 20 percent.

Joe Max Higgins: We're going to come up with a program.



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HOW FAR JOE WILL GO FOR JOBS

At 6.0 percent, unemployment is now just above the national average and a lot of people here credit Joe Max Higgins. He has attracted \$6 billion of advanced industry including this mill run by Steel Dynamics. It's one of the most hi-tech steel mills in the country. He got this helicopter factory up and running. Truck maker PACCAR used to build engines only in Europe. It opened its first U.S. plant in the Triangle.

Bill Whitaker: Companies were moving around, this offshoring. They were going to countries where everything's cheaper?

Joe Max Higgins: For some companies, offshore wasn't as great as they thought it was or as it was portrayed to be. Many of the companies said "Hey, if it's gonna be consumed in the U.S., we can produce it in the U.S. cheaper and more efficiently than we can elsewhere and bring it in."

Bill Whitaker: They save money by being here in Mississippi?

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Through the 1990s, factories here produced textiles, toys, and tubing. One by one, they shut down and thousands of low skilled jobs vanished.

Bill Whitaker: So where'd all these jobs go?

Joe Max Higgins: Well, a lotta those people just left. They were so devastated by Artech's closing, Flexible Flyer's closing, Blazon Tube closing, how 'bout that? I mean, just bam, bam, bam, the hits just keep on coming.

Joe Max Higgins was hired away from his economic development job in Arkansas to stop the hemorrhaging here in the Triangle. He makes \$250,000 a year, paid by a partnership of the three counties and local businesses. People here will tell you he earns every penny. He's like a very demanding head coach.

Joe Max Higgins: There's no taking plays off never, OK? I tell our staff, "If you leave our office and-- and you didn't do somethin' to make our place a better place today, then you need to find another job."

Bill Whitaker: You sound like a coach.

Joe Max Higgins: Well, it's probably what I should be.

Right away, he coached his small staff to the Triangle's biggest win in 50 years. They beat out Louisiana, Missouri and Arkansas – convincing the steel mill that building here was its smartest and cheapest option. Since 2007, 24 hours a day, scrap metal is dumped into giant buckets, lifted into an electric furnace and melted down in a fiery display. In the old days, a mill like this would have needed 4,000 workers. Here it takes only 650 to churn out more than 3 million tons of steel a year. Electrician Jared Glover took us as close to the blazing furnace as you can get.

Bill Whitaker: This is all automated?

Jared Glover: All the workers, we're just a small force.

This is what advanced manufacturing looks like. A small highly trained workforce keeps the automation humming. Jared Glover used to work at a lumber mill living paycheck to paycheck. Now he earns more than \$100,000 a year, about three times his old salary.

Bill Whitaker: What has that meant to you and your family?

Jared Glover: Had two kids comin' here, and now I got four, and we got a bigger house. Got a little more land. You know, we're-- they got a good school they go to, and everybody's happy.

[Joe Max Higgins: How ya doin'?)

Joe Max Higgins is the very definition of down home. But don't be fooled. It's a good bet he's got more hard-edge, business savvy than many Harvard MBAs.

[Joe Max Higgins: 170 turned into \$75 billion. Do the friggin' math.]

He outwits the competition with a bag full of tricks. He can twist your arm or kill you with kindness. He can wear you down. He lobbies relentlessly and so far has rounded up a half billion dollars in generous tax breaks and cash incentives from state and local politicians.

Joe Max Higgins: Here, there's four million in here. Let me tell you how this is structured.

Joe Max Higgins has vision and we don't mean 20/20. He can see what others don't. He took us up to show us.

Bill Whitaker: When I look out here I see beautiful green agricultural land. What do you see?

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Bill Whitaker: If you build it, they will come?

Joe Max Higgins: Yeah. We're installing the water. We're installing the sewer. We're installing the roads. And we're getting everything ready so when that company comes to locate, they're eliminating all risk. I mean, that lot's there ready to stick a shovel in and build.

Higgins had to convince county supervisors to spend almost \$12 million on that first site where Steel Dynamics now sits. He's since built up three other so called megasites and envisions more. It wasn't an easy sell at first. He told us people in the Golden Triangle were paralyzed by the decline and poverty. He saw an area rich in assets: an airport, railroads, waterways that ran north to the Great Lakes and south to the Gulf Coast, and a quality engineering program at Mississippi State.

Joe Max Higgins: I said, "These guys should be winning," you know? "It's—something's not right."

Bill Whitaker: They didn't see those advantages?

Joe Max Higgins: Correct. They didn't realize that they were big and strong and fast. Nobody'd ever told 'em they were big and strong and fast. They just thought they were, you know, slow and stupid, I guess.

Allegra Brigham: He would say, "You just have a losing attitude. You expect to be a loser. You don't expect to be a winner."

Allegra Brigham, the former CEO of the local power company, and John Davis, a bank executive, served on the search committee that recruited Higgins. They thought his brash style would shake up the status quo.

Bill Whitaker: Before Joe came in, what would have been considered a success?

John Davis: The mayor at that time said, "If you will just get us a new movie theater, we'll consider your job a success." A movie theater, which was hardly any jobs. And and they're all - they're all high schoolers.

Bill Whitaker: So when did he start to turn things around?

Allegra Brigham: Immediately.



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Joe Max Higgins: I think the helicopter plant kind of transformed this region and here's why: It was literally making something that flew. That was the project that gave us some reason to believe. "We can do this."

Just when it seemed things were taking off, the Golden Triangle was blindsided. Its biggest industrial employer, Sara Lee's century-old pork processing plant, shut down. It once employed 2,500 people. This is the factory today. Single mother Nina Head worked on the slaughter floor for 14 years, until the day it closed. She had six young children at home.

Nina Head: That was the heartbeat of the Golden Triangle.

Bill Whitaker: The heartbeat?

Nina Head: Yeah.

Bill Whitaker: And when those jobs went away?

Nina Head: You had a lot of unemployment. You had a lot of uncertainty.

It was Joe Max Higgins' biggest challenge. He became obsessed with winning the next deal. He found out PACCAR was considering building its engine plant in Jonesboro, Arkansas, near where he grew up. He got on his motorcycle and rode home to scope it out. When he got back, he convinced county supervisors to build this substation to undercut Arkansas with cheaper power. He won the deal. Today, it's a \$500 million facility filled with robots and about 500 humans. When PACCAR began hiring, 3,000 people applied for the first 50 jobs.

Bill Whitaker: Is the work force here prepared for these new jobs coming in?

Joe Max Higgins: Nobody in the Golden Triangle made engines. Nobody made any of this stuff. So what you're really looking for is, do our citizens have the acumen for work? Do they have the work ethic? Are they skilled enough to be trained to do jobs? And the answer is yes, yes, and yes.

Joe Max Higgins enlisted the community college to provide customized training for PACCAR so when the plant was ready, the workforce was ready. Nina Head now works there doing quality control. She makes \$10,000 a year more than on the kill floor at Sara Lee.

Bill Whitaker: When you first got here, did you have the skills required for this job?

Nina Head: I've never worked with robots. So I had to be trained to do that. But I had the skills 'cause I went to school to learn how to get the job.

The school now gears its training for each manufacturer coming in. Higgins told us it's the critical part of his business plan. The promise of a trained workforce caught the eye of his biggest catch yet: Yokohama Tire. The Japanese company plans to employ 2,000 workers not far from the old Sara Lee plant. It considered every county in the continental U.S. So Higgins pulled out all the stops. He tracked the tail number of the private plane shuttling Yokohama executives from site to site to find out who his competitors were. When the executives came to the Triangle, Higgins had researched their shoe sizes and had galoshes ready for them to tour the muddy site.

Bill Whitaker: This is not just about making executives feel comfortable?

Joe Max Higgins: No.

Bill Whitaker: This is hard-nosed financial negotiation?

Joe Max Higgins: Yeah. Financial negotiations. I call it, "watching game film," you know? If we were a football coach, we're watching game film, "What's the competition doin'? What do we

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Bill Whitaker: So the people who say that the glory days of American manufacturing are over, you say?

Joe Max Higgins: I think that's, I think that's not right. These plants, they pay well. Most of the working conditions are very good, and those are the jobs that are in demand. If we can create those types of industries, those types of jobs, I think the sky's still the limit for the United States.

Bill Whitaker: Sky's the limit?

Joe Max Higgins: I think it can be, yes.

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Bob in Wisconsin • 9 months ago

This guy is a role model with the leadership, energy and charisma that we need at all local levels. I don't see this guy waiting around on Fridays for his paycheck. He gets it.

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MarkACarbhonePNM • 9 months ago

This guy is my new hero. His 'we can win again' attitude is inspiring. #MAGA.

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Clayton • 9 months ago
 Clayton in Mississippi clay (west point), lowndes (columbus), and oktibbeha (starkville)

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cynic3 → Clayton in Mississippi • 9 months ago
 Clayton in Mississippi

Dad pleads guilty to manslaughter in
 toddler found in woods

I think they hshowed a map in the broadcast that had names on it. In middle eastern border.

^ | v • Share >



SmarterNewe • 9 months ago

I wonder if our gov is beating a path to his door

because they're soooooo concerned with having jobs here

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GIRLSROCK44 • 9 months ago

What makes this all possible is the commitment to training the future applicants to be qualified employees. It is no longer unskilled manufacturing but a job that requires brain power like he said. Good for the people who improved their lot in life.

^ | v • Share >



skeezix06 • 9 months ago

Thank you.

^ | v • Share >



jkatze • 9 months ago

And of course Trump the liar and megalomaniac will try to claim credit.

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MarkACarbhonePNM → jkatze • 9 months ago

Keep on bashing Trump for doing good for all of us. Good luck being a crybaby. Won't make things better.

^ | v • Share >



JohnnyDole → jkatze • 9 months ago

jkatze

Aw... poor thing. Are you still feeling a little down about losing the election? There there now... here have a cookie, and then we'll go get you a participation trophy. Yay!

^ | v • Share >



Barb94 • 9 months ago

This man has done and will do a lot more for this country than anyone in Washington is capable of doing. They are unable to think outside the box or keep it simple. All Congress can come up with is tax breaks for corporations and that has not worked in 20+ years.

^ | v • Share >



yougogirl60 → Barb94 • 8 months ago

Barb94 Not necessarily. Some of the money used for the infrastructure improvement which led to those companies choosing these particular sites were probably economic development block grants awarded by the "federal government". In fact, I am positive federal block grants were used because the Mississippi counties chosen were too revenue starved to pay for these infrastructure improvements. Just remember, many of these counties had just lost some of their largest employers, therefore, they also lost taxpayers and the taxes from their paychecks. These types of federal block grants have been around for decades. It took an intelligent, dynamic MAN LIKE jOE mAX HIGGINS TO PUT THIS PLAN TOGETHER. KUDOS TO iOE mAX!

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an14you • 9 months ago

We need to clone Joe Max Higgins. We need more people like him who are smart. Who care about the people and the companies. No more, shady deals for politicians and fat cats who only give up what they absolutely must to retain a workforce.

Joe realizes people are his most valuable asset and doesn't expect them to work for meager wages. Nor does he think the uneducated cannot be brought up to speed. I really love this guy, and I'm saying that as a Democrat who wants very much to see the every day man prosper in whatever form that takes. He is the real deal.

^ | v • Share >



Willkx → an14you • 9 months ago

an14you WE have the Koch brothers. They have created over 60K great jobs for Americans. Lefty's heads explode at the mere mention of their names. We need thousands of people like the Koch brothers.

I applaud Mr. Higgins as well.

^ | v • Share >



RZarc → an14you • 9 months ago

an14you

I'm not sure if is a Dem or a GOP'er but at the end of the day does it matter? NO!

^ | v • Share >



maingan • 9 months ago

At one point, Bill Whitaker mentioned that this area has weak labor unions. I would think that if these new jobs have the good pay and benefits as in the examples told viewers, the strategy should work in regions with strong labor unions, too. The South has been like the Third World of the USA for a long time because of weak labor unions and other factors. I'd like to see this turnaround done in places up north with strong labor unions.

^ | v • Share >



rosemarycoates → maiingan • 9 months ago

maingan GE Appliances (now Haier) brought manufacturing back to Appliance Park in Louisville and got concessions from the unions....BUT, they put 4000 people back to work. Check out our case studies at www.ReshoringInstitute.org

^ | v • Share >



pkbis • 9 months ago

Why is this story so absurd? Big White Fat Plantation owner Haley Barber kept MS in poverty for years. His successor is no better. Gimme a break.

^ | v • Share >



USMCHM → pkbis • 9 months ago

pkbis ...as opposed to the criminal Edwards family next door in LA?

^ | v • Share >



cynic3 → USMCHM • 9 months ago

USMCHM pkbis Or Jendel

^ | v • Share >



Cowdogpete • 9 months ago

Here you have a guy in the deep south, the land liberals love to is full of idiots and rednecks, that is making things better for thousands of people. On the same 60 Minutes episode, you also go to see the scum lawyer from California doing 'drive by' lawsuits to punish unsuspecting business owners and line his own pockets.

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Rafael Zeruto

787 667 4896

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9/9