

LABOR MARKET ASSESSMENT OF MID-MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT AND LEAKE COUNTY

Prepared for:

**South Mississippi Planning and Development District and
Twin District Workforce Area**

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BACKGROUND

This labor market evaluation is the product of a contract between the Wadley-Donovan Group, the South Mississippi Planning and Development District, and the Twin District Workforce Area. It is a summary of the labor market resources of a nine-county region in southeast Mississippi consisting of Clarke, Jasper, Kemper, Lauderdale, Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott, and Smith Counties. For purposes of this analysis, this region is referred to as *Region 1*. This analysis uses data obtained through two WDG-conducted surveys of labor-related issues among employers and households in the region; interviews with representative employers, educators, elected officials, staffing services, and state labor officials; and a review of key statistical and other secondary-source information. The employer survey is designed to gather information from area employers on the availability, quality, and cost of labor. The primary purpose of the household survey is to quantify and profile the area's regular labor force and its hidden labor reserve. Both surveys were produced in collaboration with Younger Associates, based in Jackson, TN, which specializes in business-to-business and business-to-consumer surveys. The interviews and secondary data supplemented this information.

The purpose of this document is to present an objective labor market assessment of the nine-county region. Executive Summaries have also been prepared for each of the nine counties and submitted under separate cover. The findings presented herein are those of WDG only. We have examined Region 1 from a corporate perspective and our own knowledge of labor markets across the U.S.

This authorized study required independent research to review the labor market resources of the region from the perspective of a locationally active company. For this study, WDG:

- Interviewed approximately seventy representative employers, educators, and government officials throughout Region 1.
- Prepared maps depicting the geographic concentration of selected demographic variables in nine 30-minute commute zones. These maps are presented in Appendix A. The commute zone nodes are:
 - Quitman Center (Clarke County)
 - Bay Springs #2 Industrial Park (Jasper County)
 - Downtown DeKalb (Kemper County)
 - US Hwy 45 and Interstate 20/59 (Lauderdale County)
 - Intersection of Hwy. 25 and Hwy. 35 (Leake County)
 - Highway 15 Bypass and Highway 19 North (Neshoba County)
 - Decatur Center (Newton County)
 - Forest Center (Scott County)
 - Raleigh Center (Smith County)

- Prepared and reviewed statistical data on key location factors for each of the nine counties, the region, the 30-minute commute zones identified in the region, Mississippi, and the U.S. Sources of information include the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the U.S. Departments of Education and Commerce, the Mississippi State Development Authority, and the Mississippi State Tax Commission. Population estimates from the 2000 Census are included, which correspond to data provided by the Center for Population Studies at the University of Mississippi. However, Applied Geographic Solutions, a demographic data vendor from Thousand Oaks, CA was also used as a data service, because complete data from the 2000 Census are not yet available. Exhibits containing the gathered data are presented in Appendix B.
- Surveyed all employers in Region 1 with ten or more employees in all business sectors except for retail and public administration. Surveys were sent to employers in those sectors with 50 or more employees. Surveys were sent in the early summer of 2002. Findings from the employer survey are presented in Appendix C.
- Surveyed in the early summer of 2002 a random stratified sample of Region 1's residents aged 18 to 74 to gather information on employment status, skills, training needs, and income and education levels. Household survey findings are presented in Appendix D.

A study of this nature can do no more than describe local conditions. The actual impact of these conditions for any given organizational activity will vary, reflecting the different characteristics and structure of each organization. WDG's principal findings and conclusions are recapped in the Executive Summary, followed by a presentation of findings on key labor market factors. Summary tables of the background data supporting our findings and commute maps are contained in the Appendices to this report.

The Wadley-Donovan Group is a Grubb & Ellis Company that specializes in location consulting. Clients include many of the world's leading companies. As an outgrowth of this corporate consulting, WDG is frequently asked by economic development agencies and utilities to assist them with their economic development programs. Assistance is typically provided in sales and marketing, strategic planning, database development, overall product development, and assessment. Clients have included New Orleans; Eastern Idaho; Hampton Roads; Orange County and Orlando, FL; Tampa; Memphis; Asheville, NC; Raleigh; Richmond, VA; Jackson, TN; Mobile and the states of Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Wisconsin, and Maryland.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Region 1 of Mississippi is a nine-county area in eastern Mississippi consisting of Clarke, Jasper, Kemper, Lauderdale, Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott, and Smith Counties. The region has a combined population of 242,074, and is expected to have moderate growth over the next five years. The largest city in Region 1 is Meridian. The region is displayed within the context of the South-Atlantic states in Figure 1, and in the context of Mississippi in Figure 2.

Key Assets

The region has a number of assets that would make it an attractive location for distribution operations and diversified light manufacturing facilities, namely, general manufacturing such as automotive parts, metal fabrication, plastics, and production machinery with 50 to 500 initial employees (depending on location within the region), and some administrative office support operations (such as entry-level back office operations) of 50 to 350 employees (depending on location within the region), including inbound call centers. The region's assets include:

- **A potential hidden labor supply with diversified skills.** For new and expanding employers, there are several sources of labor that currently may not be used to their full potential in Region 1. Key components of this hidden labor supply are:
 - **Residents that are not currently employed.** WDG estimates from its survey data that there are 32,250 working-age residents (18-74 years of age) in the region who are not employed, but are interested in employment. An inability to find a job that matches their skills and training is the major factor keeping residents out of the workforce. The occupational skill base of the region's non-employed residents who want to work are diversified. Clerical and administrative skills constitute the single largest category with 17.5%, followed by manufacturing/production (skilled) at 10%, and warehousing and hospitality/hotel/restaurant/guest services each at 7.5%. Approximately 20,640 currently-not-employed residents are interested in a job if required to receive job training.
 - **Residents currently employed.** Many of Region 1's employed residents would like to enhance their job skills. 49% of residents currently working would be interested in receiving training to acquire new job skills for career development, which equates to 50,000 individuals. These individuals would offer a potential workforce for existing and new companies offering career advancement and training opportunities. Fields of greatest training interest are: computer-related (professional and support), management/administration, government, education, social services, and financial services including insurance and real estate.
 - **Military retirees and dependents of active duty personnel at the Meridian Naval Air Station.** This military installation has 1,956 active duty personnel, 1,332 reservists, and 830 family members of stationed military personnel. Some local employers report good experiences employing military retirees and spouses from the base.
 - **Region 1's post-secondary institutions graduate more than 1,406 with associate degrees and/or certificates.**

- **Manufacturing, distribution, construction, service, and office workers are readily available.** Specific occupations identified by surveyed employers as being available in satisfactory-to-good levels include: heavy equipment operators, construction trades, machine operators, material handlers, unskilled laborers, entry-level clerical workers, clerical workers with advanced computer skills, administrative assistants, customer service representatives, accounting clerks, computer operators, educators, electrical/electronic engineers, engineers (general), food service staff, and skilled health services. Region 1 has a strong manufacturing base that provides an experienced and skilled base of employees for new and expanding employers in that sector.
- **Proximity to a good transportation network.** Interstate 20 runs east through Scott, Newton, and Lauderdale Counties and west to Jackson, Shreveport, and Dallas. I-20 connects with I-59 in Meridian and runs south through Lauderdale, Clarke, and Jasper Counties to New Orleans, and north to Birmingham. Air service is available from Jackson International Airport on the east side of Region 1 one-and-one-half hours from Meridian Kay Field, the city's airport.
- **Low to moderate wages and earnings for entry-level and experienced workers.** Based on salary information provided by local employers, labor costs in the region are low. Labor costs in Region 1 are lower in all industry sectors except mining, relative to state and national figures.
- **Strong customized and general training programs offered through the region's post-secondary institutions.** The region is served by East Central Community College in Decatur (Newton County), East Mississippi Community College in Scooba (Kemper County), Meridian Community College (Lauderdale County), and Mississippi State University–Meridian (Lauderdale County). Other nearby colleges also serve the region, including Hinds Community College, Holmes Community College, Jones County Community College, Jackson State University, University of Mississippi Medical Center, Belhaven College, Millsaps College, Tougaloo College, William Carey College, and the University of Southern Mississippi.
- **Mississippi is a pro-business state.** Mississippi has some of the lowest Workers' Compensation and unemployment insurance rates in the country. It is a right-to-work state. There is a minimal union presence. Several labor-related incentives are available from the state. Tort reform has become a state priority and will need to be successfully addressed in order to avert diminished health care delivery and escalating insurance premiums.

There is a strong base of manufacturing skills available in the region providing a skilled and experienced workforce. In that sector, approximately 37% of the workforce is employed in precision production, machine operator, transportation, and laborer/handler occupations. Region 1 has a slightly lower proportion of employment in sales, service, clerical, professional, technical, and executive occupations than the state. See Table 1 for a demographic and labor-related statistical summary of the region and its counties, the state, and the nation.

In 2000, the census reported that education levels in most of the Region 1 counties were close to state and national averages in two key categories: residents with high school diplomas and no further education; and residents with some post-secondary education but no degree. The percentage of residents with only a high school diploma in the region was higher than state and national averages, while the percentage of residents with some post-secondary education but no four-year degree was slightly below state and national averages.

Meanwhile, the proportion of residents with an associate degree was higher than the state average, but slightly below the national average. The percentage with bachelor's and graduate degrees, however, was lower in the region than state or national averages.

There is a labor cost savings in the region. Total average annual employee earnings are 8% below the state average and 35% below the national average. Meanwhile, a high proportion of households earn less than \$35,000 per year. Based on WDG's experience, the higher the percentage of households earning less than \$35,000, the more likely it is to have people who are interested in upgrading their jobs, working second jobs, or working as second income earners.

Region 1 is largely rural, with one medium sized city, Meridian, serving as the region's economic hub. Philadelphia, a smaller city, is located in Neshoba County. The region is bordered on the west by the Jackson metro area. Based on residential survey responses, the geographic distribution of these and other smaller employment centers afford 73% of the surveyed residents a commute of 30 minutes or less to work. Residents have access to a transportation network that links the region's towns and employers with some efficiency. New and expanding employers will be able to access a sizable labor force from most locations within the region. Lauderdale County has a population base of almost 100,000 within a 30-minute commute area, followed by Smith County (67, 223) and Neshoba County (58,770).

Key Challenges

Despite these assets, the area has some challenges. The key challenges include:

- Region 1's percentage of population aged 45 and older is higher than state or national averages. The region's median age of 35, compared to 33 for the state, indicates Region 1 may be losing its younger residents. Some companies shy away from locating in areas with a relatively small and aging population, because they view these areas as declining.
- The labor force in Region 1 showed no net growth between 1996 and 2001, while Mississippi's labor force grew 3% over this period and the nation grew 6.5%. The only counties in the region that showed growth were Clarke (6%), Jasper (12%), and Kemper (2%).
- The region's employment is over-represented in agricultural services, forestry and fishing, mining, and lower-wage manufacturing sectors (e.g., poultry processing). Many lower-wage production jobs, e.g., textiles and apparel, have been leaving the region and have not been replaced with higher wage jobs. Other Region 1 employment sectors are slightly under-represented and have been growing more slowly than state or national averages. As a result, the region is facing the challenge of changing economic conditions created by the national decline of low-skill, labor-intensive jobs that are either being eliminated through automation or moving offshore.
- Forty-six percent of non-employed survey residents have not held a job in the past five years, and the average length of non-employment for this population is almost 2.5 years. 40.8% of Region 1's non-employed that are interested in working indicate that there are no area jobs that match their field of training. 17.5% indicate that they have employable clerical and administrative support skills, 10% have manufacturing and production skills, 10% indicate they have construction and building trades skills, and 7.5% indicate they have warehousing skills. Further exploration of the potential of this labor pool is needed.

- Approximately 64% of non-employed survey residents (20,640) that are interested in work indicate they would be interested in a job if they were required to receive job training. Stated preferences for the following fields were indicated: 14.7% are interested in computer-related training, 11.8% in government fields, and 8.8% in social services. Further exploration of this issue is warranted.
- Almost 12% of non-employed residents who are interested in working are limited in their ability to work because of a disability. Alternative work arrangements such as flexible hiring practices, special training programs for the disabled, special transportation programs, or telecommuting may allow some of these individuals to participate in the workforce. Further exploration of the potentials of this group is also needed.
- The education levels of Region 1's residents are below state and national figures, spreadsheet and database software skills are weak, and residents and employers see a need for additional or expanded training programs, specifically in basic and life skills, allied health, computer science, and skilled craft occupations. While the area's secondary and post-secondary schools have taken several steps to address training needs and deficiencies, there is still room for improvement.

Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

- In the secondary schools, emphasis needs to be placed on keeping students in school until they receive their high school diplomas. This must be a joint effort between educators and parents. For those high school students not interested in obtaining a two-year or four-year college degree, local vocational and technical education must be enhanced to prepare these students for career development and job preparation. Greater career and job counseling for middle school and high school students not interested in college is also needed. Students who drop out before they receive their diplomas, and adults without high school diplomas need to be provided alternative, convenient ways to receive their GEDs, including night or weekend classes at local facilities. Meanwhile, employers would like to see additional emphasis by the high schools on work ethic and job preparedness skills. For the region, the priority should be maintaining the number of students who are receiving high school diplomas or equivalents, and enrolling and graduating more students from vocational and technical programs at the two-year, post-secondary level.
- A mismatch exists between the occupations most in demand by local employers and the availability of those skills. The skills that are most prevalent, such as clerical and general office support skills, are not in high demand by local employers. Meanwhile, there is a significant current and projected demand for skilled machine trades and machine and equipment maintenance and repair skills, but employers report limited availability of job applicants for these positions. The solution to this skills gap is ultimately a long-term focus on enrolling more students into and graduating more students from technical and vocational programs in machine trades, machinery repair and maintenance, and technicians with manufacturing, process, overhaul, and maintenance skills. Increased outreach on tech-prep programs and apprenticeship programs to both high school students and adults may help alleviate some of this pressure.
- Other occupations in demand include management trainees, retail and non-retail sales, computer technical support specialists, and computer network administrators. Many of these positions could be filled by students or adults with a matching associates degree. Region 1 enjoys access to several community colleges with branch campuses that can provide the necessary training to meet

occupational demand for these positions. Employers need to better engage the educational institutions in their communities both to provide customized training to upgrade existing employee skill sets, and to convey their current and anticipated demand for graduates with specific educational training and expertise.

- Residents and employers have identified several other training needs. Adult education programs such as basic math, literacy, computer software and certification courses, and GED programs need to be expanded and made accessible to the general public. Innovative ways to offer remedial and basic education classes need to be explored, such as scheduling at different times of the day and evening and increasing the number of class locations. Expanding and enhancing the training opportunities for students and workers will be a major factor in the development of the area. Some of this training could be offered by area employers. Employers that offer training and career advancement opportunities, good working conditions, and career advancement opportunities will be the most successful in attracting quality employees.
- Many localities within Region 1 report a shortage of affordable rental housing. In some cases, employers are purchasing housing and busing workers to their plants. New and expanding employers may be faced with a tightening labor supply should additional affordable housing not be developed within their communities. This issue needs to be explored in more detail.
- The Pearl River Resort (Neshoba County) has established a hospitality institute to provide on-site skills training for their hotel and casino workforce. At present, the state does not allow cooperative agreements between the gaming industry and state-supported educational institutions to coordinate delivery of skills training. This issue should be further explored in light of the significant planned growth and labor demand of the gaming industry in the region.
- Many area employers reported dissatisfaction with the job readiness and basic skills of applicants and new hires. High schools should consider establishing life skills training programs and pre-employment training programs for graduating students intending to enter the workforce. If successfully implemented, first year turnover for entry-level workers could be reduced. In addition, high schools should consider "guaranteeing" their graduates. Should an employer determine that a recently hired high school graduate does not possess minimum educational attainment commensurate with that of a typical high school graduate, the high school should offer remedial training at its cost.
- Tier-two and tier-three automotive suppliers are investigating Region 1 for the establishment of new production and distribution facilities. The establishment of a cooperative automotive skills training institute should be investigated by the region's community colleges (ECCC, EMCC, MCC). This would convey a strong message that the region is prepared to make the necessary human resource investment to attract the industry and its employment opportunities. Other industries that would be suitable for recruitment and attraction efforts include distribution centers, back office administrative operations, and general manufacturing operations including plastics, fabricated metal products, and production machinery.

FIGURE 1
THE STUDIED REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOUTH-ATLANTIC U.S.



FIGURE 2
THE STUDIED REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

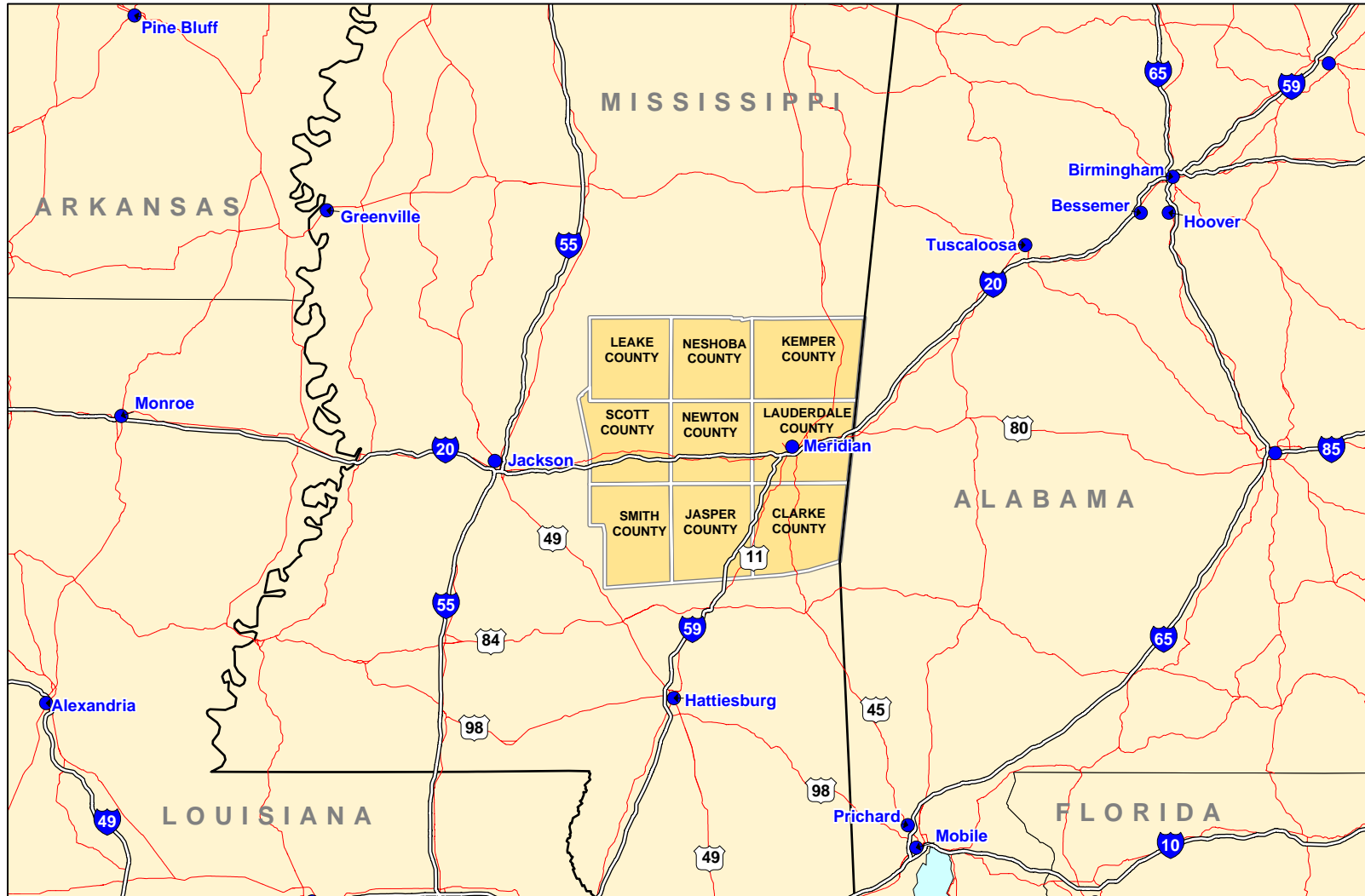


TABLE 1
COMPARATIVE DATA ON REGION 1 AND ITS COUNTIES, MISSISSIPPI, AND THE U.S.

Source: AGS, Inc., U.S. Bureau of the Census

	Clarke County	Jasper County	Kemper County	Lauderdale County	Leake County	Neshoba County	Newton County	Scott County	Smith County	Region 1 Counties	MS	United States
Civilian Labor Force (Average Annual)												
1996 Annual Average	8,558	7,625	4,256	35,084	9,175	16,262	8,404	12,672	5,996	108,032	1,257,262	132,315,167
2001 Annual Average	9,078	8,509	4,344	34,659	9,012	15,788	8,189	12,156	5,945	107,680	1,296,193	140,871,833
% Change '01 - '06	6.1%	11.6%	2.1%	-1.2%	-1.8%	-2.9%	-2.6%	-4.1%	-0.9%	-0.3%	3.1%	6.5%
Select Occupational Skills Base (2001); % of Total Employment												
Executive	6.1%	6.7%	4.9%	8.1%	5.3%	4.8%	5.1%	6.4%	4.0%	6.3%	7.7%	12.6%
Professional	10.8%	11.2%	9.6%	13.6%	9.3%	10.8%	9.8%	8.8%	8.5%	11.1%	13.0%	14.4%
Technician	2.1%	2.3%	2.5%	3.3%	1.5%	2.5%	2.8%	1.6%	1.9%	2.5%	3.0%	3.8%
Manufacturing												
Precision Production	16.0%	14.0%	10.7%	11.8%	15.8%	13.4%	15.6%	16.3%	14.6%	13.9%	12.6%	11.6%
Machine Operators	15.5%	14.1%	17.7%	6.1%	15.1%	18.2%	18.8%	11.4%	12.8%	12.3%	9.7%	7.0%
Transportation	7.4%	7.5%	6.6%	4.6%	6.4%	5.9%	3.9%	4.5%	7.8%	5.5%	5.0%	4.2%
Laborers / Handlers	4.3%	6.2%	5.0%	3.7%	6.3%	4.8%	4.3%	7.1%	5.6%	4.9%	4.4%	4.0%
Sales, Service, Clerical												
Sales	7.1%	6.6%	5.2%	13.7%	7.5%	9.4%	7.3%	9.3%	7.2%	9.8%	10.5%	12.0%
Clerical	13.4%	10.8%	11.7%	16.3%	11.7%	11.9%	11.3%	11.1%	13.1%	13.3%	14.8%	16.6%
Services	12.0%	14.4%	18.0%	17.2%	13.3%	13.2%	13.2%	12.8%	11.8%	14.6%	15.1%	11.3%
Education Levels (2000)												
High School Diploma Only	41.0%	38.3%	37.3%	33.2%	35.4%	38.1%	32.7%	34.3%	39.7%	35.6%	32.7%	33.8%
1 to 3 Years College	13.6%	13.6%	13.5%	19.2%	13.0%	12.4%	17.2%	12.4%	12.9%	15.4%	16.0%	17.1%
Associate Degree	6.0%	5.4%	5.4%	9.1%	4.6%	7.5%	7.4%	4.8%	4.7%	6.9%	6.5%	7.4%
Bachelors Degree	7.2%	9.1%	7.7%	11.3%	9.2%	8.7%	8.3%	9.6%	7.9%	9.5%	12.7%	16.2%
Average Annual Earnings (2000)												
Total – All Industries	\$20,780	\$20,656	\$17,207	\$24,100	\$16,487	\$24,642	\$20,513	\$18,373	\$22,946	\$22,026	\$23,875	\$34,011
Income Levels (1999)												
Less than \$35,000	61.2%	65.0%	64.9%	56.2%	61.1%	59.4%	58.7%	61.6%	56.0%	60.5%	54.8%	41.4%
\$35,000 to \$75,000	30.2%	28.2%	28.3%	31.5%	30.1%	31.3%	32.8%	30.1%	35.0%	30.8%	32.5%	36.1%
Greater than \$75,000	8.6%	6.8%	6.7%	12.4%	8.7%	14.8%	8.6%	8.3%	9.0%	9.3%	12.8%	22.5%

LABOR MARKET ORIENTATION

1. **Mississippi's Region 1 is a nine-county area in eastern Mississippi consisting of Clarke, Jasper, Kemper, Lauderdale, Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott, and Smith Counties.** The region is displayed within the context of the south-Atlantic region of the United States in Figure 1, and in the context of Mississippi in Figure 2. Distances from Meridian (the largest community in Lauderdale County and the region) to major regional centers are shown in Table 2.
- Primary access to the region is provided by Interstate 20, which runs east and west through Scott, Newton, and Lauderdale Counties, intersecting Interstate 55 to the east in Jackson and Interstate 59 to the west in Meridian. I-20 accesses key east/west markets including Dallas/Fort Worth to the west and Atlanta to the east. Interstate 59 runs south through Clarke and Jasper Counties to New Orleans and northeast as I-59/20 to Birmingham.
 - Air service is available through Jackson International Airport and Meridian Kay Field. Jackson lies to the west of the region and Meridian lies in the eastern part of the region in Lauderdale County.
 - Meridian serves as a key Mississippi gateway to Alabama. Region 1 draws about 5% of its workforce from Alabama, mostly to Lauderdale County.

TABLE 2
DISTANCE FROM MERIDIAN TO SELECT LOCAL AND REGIONAL CENTERS
 Source: Microsoft Automap

Destination City	Driving Time	Highway Miles	Destination City	Driving Time	Highway Miles
Atlanta, GA	291.6	4 hrs, 44 mins	Louisville, KY	509.1	8 hrs, 14 mins
Baltimore, MD	927.7	14 hrs, 47 mins	Memphis, TN	299.6	4 hrs, 51 mins
Baton Rouge, LA	255.4	4 hrs, 13 mins	Miami, FL	855.5	14 hrs, 34 mins
Biloxi, MS	174.2	3 hrs, 8 mins	Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN	1,207.90	19 hrs, 2 mins
Birmingham, AL	145.5	2 hrs, 25 mins	Mobile, AL	133.4	2 hrs, 48 mins
Boston, MA	1,327.10	21 hrs, 19 mins	Montgomery, AL	156.9	3 hrs, 11 mins
Chattanooga, TN	294.4	4 hrs, 41 mins	Nashville, TN	3,335.60	5 hrs, 25 mins
Chicago, IL	806.9	13 hrs, 1 min	New Orleans, LA	198	3 hrs, 15 mins
Cincinnati, OH	608.6	9 hrs, 48 mins	New York, NY	1,111.30	17 hrs, 38 mins
Columbus, GA	245.9	4 hrs, 44 mins	Omaha, NE	1,004.90	16 hrs, 2 mins
Dallas/Fort Worth, TX	494.7	7 hrs, 58 mins	Pascagoula, MS	168.2	3 hrs, 24 mins
Denver, CO	1,371.90	21 hrs, 42 mins	Pensacola, FL	194	3 hrs, 52 mins
Gulfport, MS	161.4	2 hrs, 54 mins	Phoenix, AZ	1,560.30	24 hrs, 27 mins
Hattiesburg, MS	89.3	1 hr, 34 mins	Salt Lake City, UT	1,898.50	29 hrs, 52 mins
Houston, TX	523	8 hrs, 25 mins	San Francisco, CA	2,312.40	36 hrs, 32 mins
Huntsville, AL	244.4	4 hrs	Seattle, WA	2,689.10	42 hrs, 16 mins
Jackson, MS	93.5	1 hrs, 36 mins	Shreveport, LA	311.3	5 hrs, 4 mins
Jacksonville, FL	538.8	9 hrs, 13 mins	St. Louis, MO	584.6	9 hrs, 24 mins
Kansas City, MO	816.6	13 hrs, 7 mins	Tallahassee, FL	376.8	6 hrs, 42 mins
Los Angeles, CA	1,932.80	30 hrs, 25 mins	Washington, DC	891.2	14 hrs, 11 mins

- 2. Region 1 has a total population of 242,074.** Lauderdale is the largest county in the study area, with an estimated 2001 population of 78,253, followed by Neshoba County (29,014), Scott County (28,788), Newton County (21,950), Leake County (21,144), Jasper County (18,216), Clarke County (17,980), Smith County (16,287), and Kemper County (10,442). Region 1 had low growth relative to state and national figures since 1990, and this trend is projected to continue over the next five years. Table 3 shows population estimates and projections for each county in Region 1, the state, and the U.S. Full demographic information is provided in Exhibits B-1 and B-2 in Appendix B. Complete demographic information for the region’s commute zones is provided in Exhibit B-3.
- Between 1990 and 2000 Leake, Neshoba and Scott Counties experienced respective growth rates of 14%, 16% and 18%, substantially greater than the state and U.S. averages. Each of these counties’ growth rates is estimated to exceed the state average over the next five years, and all will equal or exceed the national average over the next five years.

TABLE 3
POPULATION OF MISSISSIPPI'S REGION 1
 Source: US Bureau of the Census, Applied Geographic Solutions

	Clarke Co.	Jasper Co.	Kemper Co.	Lauderdale Co.	Leake Co.	Neshoba Co.	Newton Co.	Scott Co.	Smith Co.	Region1 Co's.	MS	US
1990	17,313	17,114	10,356	75,554	18,436	24,801	20,291	24,137	14,798	222,800	2,573,216	248,032,617
2000	17,555	18,149	10,453	78,161	20,940	28,684	21,838	28,423	16,182	240,385	2,844,658	275,056,048
2001	17,980	18,216	10,442	78,253	21,144	29,014	21,950	28,788	16,287	242,074	2,865,906	283,960,915
2006	18,401	18,779	10,586	80,005	22,260	30,704	22,729	30,625	16,951	251,040	2,993,011	299,332,566
Change '90 - '00	1.4%	6.0%	0.9%	3.5%	13.6%	15.7%	7.6%	17.8%	9.4%	7.9%	10.5%	10.9%
Change '01 - '06	2.3%	3.1%	1.4%	2.2%	5.2%	5.8%	3.5%	6.4%	4.1%	3.7%	4.4%	5.4%

- 3. Median income and educational levels in the region are below state and national norms.** The median household income in Region 1 in 2001 was \$26,467, compared to \$30,064 statewide and \$45,297 nationally. The lowest median household income was found in Kemper County (\$21,209). According to AGS, the data vendor, approximately 60% of the region’s households earn less than \$35,000 per year, compared to 58% in Mississippi and 41% nationally. Based on WDG’s experience, the higher the percentage of households earning less than \$35,000, the more it is likely to have people who are interested in upgrading their jobs, working a second job, or working as a second-income earner. (See Exhibit B-1 in Appendix B).
- According to the household survey, approximately 34% of employed respondents individually earn less than \$25,000 per year, and 54% earn less than \$35,000 annually.
 - In 2001, according to AGS, approximately 72% of the region’s population over the age of 25 had at least a high school diploma, compared to 74% in Mississippi and 82.5% in the nation. Approximately 22% of the population in Region 1 had some post-secondary education but no four-year degree (i.e., associate’s degree or one to three years of college). Comparatively, 22.5% of the

population in Mississippi and 24.5% of the population in the U.S. had this level of education. Based on Wadley-Donovan's household survey, approximately 93% of survey residents between the ages of 18 and 74 have at least a high school diploma or GED.

4. **The region is losing a key labor force component.** Residents aged 18-34 are leaving the region. This population segment is expected to fall 6.9% over the five-year projection period, 2001-2006 (see Exhibit B-1 in Appendix B). A similar but smaller population loss in this age segment is projected for Mississippi (-5.3%), compared to a projected growth of 3.6% for the nation.
5. **The region's median age is older than the state and virtually the same as the national average.** The median age of the region's residents is 34.5 years, compared to 33.0 years for Mississippi and 34.9 years for the U.S.
6. **The region's retired population is expected to grow faster than the nation.** The 2001-2006 projection in population aged 75 and over is expected to grow 19.7% in Region 1, as compared to 19.2% in Mississippi and 8% in the nation.
7. **Region 1 has a large manufacturing base.** As seen in Table 4, the region's second largest industry sector is manufacturing, with 27.5% of total industry employment. The region's manufacturing sector is slightly smaller than the services sector (28.3%), and significantly larger than the state manufacturing average (22.1%) and the national average (16.5%). Manufacturing concentrations exceeding 27% of total industry employment are found in all regional counties except Lauderdale (See Table 4). Exhibit B-4 shows the change in industry employment between 1990 and 2001. Exhibit B-5 shows the change in industry employment by commute zone.

TABLE 4
EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY (2001)

Source: Applied Geographic Solutions

Industry	Clarke Co.	Jasper Co.	Kemper Co.	Lauderdale Co.	Leake Co.	Neshoba Co.	Newton Co.	Scott Co.	Smith Co.	Region 1	MS	US
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Agricultural Services, Forestry, and Fishing	2.7%	3.6%	4.7%	1.1%	5.9%	3.4%	5.3%	9.9%	7.5%	4.1%	3.3%	2.4%
Mining	4.0%	4.0%	0.1%	0.3%	1.9%	0.6%	0.3%	0.4%	1.2%	1.1%	0.9%	0.5%
Construction	4.7%	5.6%	7.0%	5.4%	7.7%	5.4%	5.4%	5.5%	6.9%	5.7%	6.4%	6.2%
Manufacturing	36.2%	29.8%	31.3%	15.7%	30.6%	33.1%	36.7%	33.1%	34.4%	27.5%	22.1%	16.5%
Transportation and Public Utilities	5.0%	7.1%	6.9%	7.9%	5.0%	6.6%	3.7%	3.6%	7.6%	6.3%	6.4%	6.8%
Wholesale Trade	2.2%	2.4%	3.0%	4.8%	2.7%	3.0%	2.0%	2.9%	2.5%	3.3%	3.8%	4.4%
Retail Trade	12.2%	12.9%	10.7%	19.5%	12.8%	14.8%	12.4%	14.9%	10.8%	15.2%	16.2%	16.8%
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	3.1%	3.0%	3.0%	5.6%	3.9%	3.3%	3.6%	3.4%	2.8%	4.1%	4.8%	6.9%
Services	26.3%	28.3%	25.7%	34.0%	24.8%	25.6%	26.3%	24.0%	24.2%	28.3%	31.3%	34.7%
Unclassified Establishments	3.6%	3.4%	7.6%	5.6%	4.5%	4.0%	4.3%	2.3%	2.0%	4.3%	4.8%	4.7%

8. **The regions' manufacturing sector needs greater diversity and needs to become less dependent on food (the largest sub-sector, which is dominated by poultry processing), apparel, and wood processing (two large, but low-paying sub-sectors).** In addition, employers are generally small and moderately sized except for the poultry processing industry, which is growing and remains labor intensive. Manufacturing facilities are generally becoming more automated and less labor-intensive. This trend requires a trained workforce capable of operating more sophisticated equipment being installed by retooling companies, and the attraction of new employers who can absorb and train surplus production workers who are becoming increasingly available due to downsizings and plant closures within the textile industry.
9. **The region is under-represented in finance, insurance, and real estate sector employment, with only 4% of employment in this sector, compared to 5% in Mississippi and 7% in the nation.** Region 1 is also under-represented in construction, transportation and public utilities, wholesale trade, services, and retail trade.
- There is a lower proportion of employment in executive and professional occupations in the region than in Mississippi or the U.S. Seventeen percent of the region's employment is in these occupations, compared to 21% in Mississippi and 27 % nationally. There is also lower employment in technical, sales, and clerical occupations relative to the state and nation (See Table 5 and Exhibits B-6 and B-7 in Appendix B).

TABLE 5
EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION (2001)

Source: Applied Geographic Solutions

Occupation	Clarke Co.	Jasper Co.	Kemper Co.	Lauderdale Co.	Leake Co.	Neshoba Co.	Newton Co.	Scott Co.	Smith Co.	Region 1 Co's.	MS	US
Executive	6.1%	6.7%	4.9%	8.1%	5.3%	4.8%	5.1%	6.4%	4.0%	6.3%	7.7%	12.6%
Professional	10.8%	11.2%	9.6%	13.6%	9.3%	10.8%	9.8%	8.8%	8.5%	11.1%	13.0%	14.4%
Technician	2.1%	2.3%	2.5%	3.3%	1.5%	2.5%	2.8%	1.6%	1.9%	2.5%	3.0%	3.8%
Sales	7.1%	6.6%	5.2%	13.7%	7.5%	9.4%	7.3%	9.3%	7.2%	9.8%	10.5%	12.0%
Clerical	13.4%	10.8%	11.7%	16.3%	11.7%	11.9%	11.3%	11.1%	13.1%	13.3%	14.8%	16.6%
Services	12.0%	14.4%	18.0%	17.2%	13.3%	13.2%	13.2%	12.8%	11.8%	14.6%	15.1%	11.3%
Farming	5.3%	6.2%	8.1%	1.6%	7.9%	5.2%	7.9%	10.8%	12.6%	5.8%	4.2%	2.5%
Precision Production	16.0%	14.0%	10.7%	11.8%	15.8%	13.4%	15.6%	16.3%	14.6%	13.9%	12.6%	11.6%
Machine Operators	15.5%	14.1%	17.7%	6.1%	15.1%	18.2%	18.8%	11.4%	12.8%	12.3%	9.7%	7.0%
Transportation	7.4%	7.5%	6.6%	4.6%	6.4%	5.9%	3.9%	4.5%	7.8%	5.5%	5.0%	4.2%
Laborers / Handlers	4.3%	6.2%	5.0%	3.7%	6.3%	4.8%	4.3%	7.1%	5.6%	4.9%	4.4%	4.0%

10. The health services sector is a key regional employer, especially in Meridian (Lauderdale County). Area employers are experiencing difficulty recruiting and retaining experienced health care practitioners. This challenge will grow as the population of the region ages and the demand for health services workers increases.

TABLE 6
EMPLOYMENT IN REGION 1 MANUFACTURING AND SERVICE SUBSECTORS, 1997

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce

Industry Subsector	NAICS	Employment	Average Annual Earnings	Average Establishment Size
Manufacturing	31----	24,583	\$22,130	101.6
Food Manufacturing	311///	9,678	N/A	420.8
Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing	334///	2,550	N/A	212.5
Apparel Manufacturing	315///	2,368	N/A	157.9
Wood Product Manufacturing	321///	2,029	N/A	54.8
Furniture and Related Product Manufacturing	337///	1,916	N/A	159.7
Transportation Equipment Manufacturing	336///	1,510	N/A	167.8
Electrical Equipment, Appliance and Component Manufacturing	335///	1,395	N/A	116.3
Health Care and Social Assistance	62----	9,372	\$27,989	26.3
Hospitals	622///	5,412	N/A	386.6
Ambulatory Health Care Services	621///	2,667	N/A	11.8
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	623///	1,724	N/A	55.6
Social Assistance	624///	621	N/A	7.2

TABLE 7
REGION 1'S COMMUTING PROFILE
 Source: YA/WDG Residential Survey Summer 2002

County of Residence	Worksite										
	Clarke Co.	Jasper Co.	Kemper Co.	Lauderdale Co.	Leake Co.	Neshoba Co.	Newton Co.	Scott Co.	Smith Co.	Other	Total
Clarke Co.	29.2%	0%	0%	54.2%	0%	4.2%	0%	0%	0%		100%
Jasper Co.	0%	42.1%	0%	15.8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%		100%
Kemper Co.	3.4%	0%	34.5%	44.8%	0%	0%	0%	3.4%	0%		100%
Lauderdale Co.	0%	0%	1.9%	97.1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%		100%
Leake Co.	0%	0%	0%	0%	68.2%	4.5%	0%	4.5%	0%		100%
Neshoba Co.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	81.8%	13.6%	0%	0%		100%
Newton Co.	0%	0%	0%	24.4%	0%	2.3%	65.9%	4.9%	0%		100%
Scott Co.	0%	0%	0%	0%	4.0%	4.0%	8.0%	N/A	0%		100%
Smith Co.	0%	0%	0%	17.9%	0%	3.6%	0%	4.6%	53.6%		100%

11. There is some cross-commuting by residents in Region 1. Meridian, in Lauderdale County, is the major employment center and draws labor from counties throughout the region. Forty-five percent of the region's resident labor is employed in the county. Some residents commute to employment centers in surrounding counties and the Jackson metro area. However, Jones County, which borders Region 1 to the south, exports more workers to Region 1 than it imports.

- The employer survey documented that Region 1 imports 5% of its workforce from Alabama

LABOR AVAILABILITY

- Region 1 has a moderately sized, but declining, labor force.** The region has a labor force of 110,000. According to data provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the labor force contracted by 0.3% between 1996 and 2001. This rate contrasts with a 3% growth rate for the state and a 6.5% growth rate for the nation. (See Table 8 and Exhibit B-8 in Appendix B).

TABLE 8
POPULATION AND LABOR FORCE IN THE REGION'S 30-MINUTE COMMUTE ZONES

Source: US Bureau of the Census, Applied Geographic Solutions, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

	Clarke Co. 30-min. CZ Quitman Center	Jasper Co. 30-min. CZ Bay Springs #2 Ind'l Park	Kemper Co. 30-min. CZ Downtown DeKalb	Lauderdale Co. 30-min. CZ US 20 and I-45	Leake Co. 30-min. CZ Hwy. 25 and Hwy. 35	Neshoba Co. 30-min. CZ Hwy 15 and Hwy 19N	Newton Co. 30-min. CZ Decatur Center	Scott Co. 30-min. CZ Forest Center	Smith Co. 30-min. CZ Raleigh Center	Region 1 Counties
Population										
1990	19,891	50,807	40,335	96,213	31,784	52,256	43,978	38,282	55,109	222,800
2001	20,786	53,620	41,210	99,833	35,769	58,770	46,852	43,967	67,223	240,385
2006	21,310	55,153	41,953	102,138	37,467	61,511	48,305	46,282	71,906	242,074
Change '90 - '01	4.5%	5.5%	2.2%	3.8%	12.5%	12.5%	6.5%	14.9%	22.0%	7.9%
Change '01 - '06	2.5%	2.9%	1.8%	2.3%	4.7%	4.7%	3.1%	5.3%	7.0%	3.7%
Civilian Labor Force										
2001	9,681	23,684	18,615	46,791	15,672	27,358	21,722	20,623	32,861	107,680

- The largest labor pool of the region is found in Lauderdale County's labor shed.** Typically, most nonexempt and hourly employees will commute up to 30 minutes for a competitively paying job. Therefore, one thirty-minute commute zone for each of the Region 1 counties was used to estimate the labor force available to a company locating at each of these locations. These zones are shown in Exhibit B-9 and Table 8, and illustrated in Appendix A.
 - The intersection of US Hwy 45 and Interstate 20/59 in Lauderdale County provides the largest accessible labor force among the nine counties. Within 30 minutes of this site there is a labor force of approximately 46,800. The second largest labor pool is found at the Smith County site. There is an estimated labor force of 32,900 within 30 minutes of this site. Table 8 shows population and labor force characteristics for the nine thirty-minute commute zones within Region 1.
- Availability of various skills is reasonably good, according to local employers.** Among the 37 occupations listed on the WDG employer survey form for which sufficient data were received, employers indicated that twenty-six occupations can be recruited satisfactorily, four can be recruited with minor difficulty, one is somewhat difficult to recruit, and six are difficult to find. See Tables 9, 10, and 11 below, and Exhibit C-1 in the Appendix.

- Among those occupations that can be recruited satisfactorily and with minimal difficulty are a number of distribution, manufacturing, and office support occupations. Specific office occupations include experienced management, professionals, clerical workers (both entry-level and with advanced computer skills), administrative assistants, entry-level and experienced customer service representatives, accounting clerks, and computer operators. The manufacturing and distribution occupations include material handling laborers, unskilled workers, truck drivers, machine operators with and without setup skills, and maintenance mechanics/electricians.
- Those occupations that are somewhat difficult or difficult to find are largely professional, technical, and skilled manufacturing-related occupations. These include, among others, experienced maintenance workers, computer network administrators, mechanical engineers, bilingual/multilingual personnel, and retail sales staff.

TABLE 9
RECRUITING EXPERIENCES OF SURVEYED REGIONAL EMPLOYERS FOR SELECTED OCCUPATIONS
 (5=PLENTIFUL; 1=UNAVAILABLE)
 Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Occupation	Responses	Average Rating	Median Rating
Satisfactory to Good Recruiting Experiences			
Clerical workers, entry-level	32	4.9	4.0
Heavy equipment operators	6	4.2	4.0
Education, teaching assistants	8	3.9	4.0
Call center customer service, inbound, experienced	7	3.6	4.0
Unskilled laborers, manufacturing	10	3.6	3.5
Administrative assistants	26	3.5	3.5
Material handlers	8	3.5	3.0
Clerical workers, advanced computer skills	25	3.4	3.0
Computer operators	11	3.4	4.0
Education, certified teachers/administrators	14	3.4	3.0
Hospitality – housekeeping, other services	5	3.4	3.0
Health services, skilled	16	3.3	3.5
Applicants willing to work second shift	29	3.3	3.0
Food service, wait staff	12	3.3	3.0
Unskilled laborers, expect manufacturing	12	3.3	3.0
Call center customer service rep, inbound, entry-level	5	3.2	4.0
Accounting clerks	32	3.2	3.0
Applicants willing to work third shift	19	3.2	3.0
Construction trades, general	8	3.1	3.0
Construction trades, skilled	10	3.1	3.0
Engineers, general, entry-level	5	3.0	3.0

TABLE 9, CONTINUED
RECRUITING EXPERIENCES OF SURVEYED REGIONAL EMPLOYERS FOR SELECTED OCCUPATIONS
 (5=PLENTIFUL; 1=UNAVAILABLE)
 Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Occupation	Responses	Average Rating	Median Rating
Satisfactory to Good Recruiting Experiences			
Food service, meal preparation	20	3.0	3.0
Health services, technicians	7	3.0	3.0
Machine operators, no setup	5	3.0	3.0
Machine operators, with setup	7	3.0	3.0
Maintenance mechanics/electricians	12	3.0	3.0

TABLE 10
BORDERLINE SATISFACTORY RECRUITING EXPERIENCES OF SURVEYED
REGIONAL EMPLOYERS FOR SELECTED OCCUPATIONS
 (5=PLENTIFUL; 1=UNAVAILABLE)
 Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Borderline Satisfactory Recruiting Experiences	Responses	Average Rating	Median Rating
Management, experienced	12	2.9	3.0
Truck drivers	15	2.9	3.0
Professionals/management	15	2.9	3.0
Health services, professional	22	2.8	3.0

TABLE 11
SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT AND DIFFICULT RECRUITING EXPERIENCES OF SURVEYED
REGIONAL EMPLOYERS FOR SELECTED OCCUPATIONS
 (5=PLENTIFUL; 1=UNAVAILABLE)
 Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Somewhat Difficult Recruiting Experiences	Responses	Average Rating	Median Rating
Management trainees	10	2.4	2.5
Difficult Recruiting Experiences			
Maintenance, experienced	10	2.7	2.0
Engineers, mechanical	5	2.6	2.0
Bilingual/multilingual personnel	9	2.4	2.0
Sales, retail	5	2.2	2.0
Sales, non-retail	7	2.1	2.0
Computer network administrators	8	2.0	2.0

- 4. Employers report satisfactory to slightly unsatisfactory results recruiting managers and professionals from outside the region.** A median rating of 3.0 and an average rating of 2.7 were provided by surveyed employers for recruiting managers and professionals from outside the area, where 1=poor and 5=excellent. Recruiting difficulties are experienced despite an employer well-rated quality of life. Table 12 provides ratings of Region 1's quality of life as reported by local employers. The only categories to receive a less than satisfactory rating were the availability of affordable rental housing and personal income tax, which each receiving an average score of 2.9.
- Positive quality-of-life considerations are public and private education, recreation, arts and cultural amenities, availability of affordable homes, climate, health care services, low crime, and lack of traffic congestion.
 - One factor contributing to the difficulty recruiting professionals from outside the area is the limited employment opportunities for "trailing spouses". Employment opportunities for trailing spouses are somewhat unsatisfactory, according to survey results (median score of 3.0 and average score of 2.4).

TABLE 12
QUALITY OF LIFE RATINGS FOR REGION 1
(5=EXCELLENT; 1=POOR)
 Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Quality of Life	Average Score	Median Score
Private Education (K-12)	3.5	4.0
Health care services	3.5	4.0
Public education (K-12)	3.4	3.0
Recreation	3.4	3.0
Climate	3.4	3.0
Safety from crime	3.4	3.0
Traffic /road congestion	3.4	3.0
Availability of affordable homes	3.1	3.0
Arts and cultural amenities	3.0	3.0
Availability of affordable rentals	2.9	3.0
Personal income tax	2.9	3.0

- 5. Region 1 has a potential hidden labor supply with diversified skills.** WDG estimates from its survey data and 2001 population data that there are roughly 32,250 working-age residents (18-74 years of age) in the region who are not employed but are interested in employment. Separate data for each of the counties and the region are provided in Table 13. See Exhibit D for complete household survey results.
- Most of the non-employed residents who are interested in working (65% or 20,962) are interested in full-time work, as shown in Table 13. Meanwhile, there are an estimated 10,150 individuals who are not working, but who would be interested in part-time employment.

- The leading reasons for these individuals not to be in the workplace are: inability to find a suitable job (41%); being retired (27%); raising a family (10%); being disabled (8%); and attending school (4%). See Table 15.
- About 25% of this potential labor pool lives in Lauderdale County, 12% in Newton, 9% in Kemper, 8% in Clarke, and 4% in Jasper. The remaining 42% of this potential workforce lives in Leake, Neshoba, Scott, and Smith Counties. Specific data for these counties could not be shown due to low survey response rates. Survey responses for these four latter counties have been aggregated into regional totals. (See Table 14).
- The occupational skill base of Region 1’s non-employed residents who want to work are moderately diversified. Table 16 outlines the largest occupational skill groups within this sector of the population. As the table indicates, clerical and administrative skills constitute the single largest category, with close to 17.5% of the non-employed residents who would be interested in working.

TABLE 13
WORK PREFERENCES OF NON-EMPLOYED RESIDENTS INTERESTED IN WORKING
 Source: YA/WDG Residential Survey, Summer 2002

Interest	Clarke Co.		Jasper Co.		Kemper Co.		Lauderdale Co.		Leake Co.		Neshoba Co.		Newton Co.		Scott Co.		Smith Co.		Region1	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Interested in Employment	2,407	67%	1,286	33%	2,505	86%	7,096	38%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3,364	50%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	32,250	56%
Not Interested in Employment/Did not Respond	1,186	33%	2,610	67%	408	14%	11,577	62%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3,364	50%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	25,750	44%
Total	3,593	100%	3,896	100%	2,913	100%	18,673	100%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6,728	100%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	58,000	100%
Interest in Employment:																				
Part-Time	602	25%	424	33%	1,253	50%	2,200	31%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,110	33%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	11,288	35%
Full-Time	1,805	75%	849	66%	1,252	50%	4,896	69%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2,220	66%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	20,962	65%
Total	2,407	100%	1,286	100%	2,505	100%	7,096	100%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3,364	100%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	32,250	100%

TABLE 14
GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF NON-EMPLOYED RESIDENTS INTERESTED IN EMPLOYMENT
 Source: YA/WDG Residential Survey, Summer 2002

Residence	Number	Percent
Clarke County	5,612	17.4%
Jasper County	2,096	6.5%
Kemper County	4,193	13.0%
Lauderdale County	9,127	28.3%
Newton County	2,096	6.5%
Leake, Neshoba, Scott, and Smith Counties	9,126	28.3%
Region 1 Total	32,250	100%

TABLE 15
REASONS FOR NON-EMPLOYMENT AMONG RESIDENTS NOT IN THE WORKFORCE
BUT INTERESTED IN EMPLOYMENT

Source: YA/WDG Residential Survey, Summer 2002

Reason	Number	Percent
Can't find a suitable job	13,158	40.8%
Retired	8,546	26.5%
Raising a family	3,290	10.2%
Disabled	2,645	8.2%
Other*	2,645	8.2%
Attending school	1,322	4.1%
Not looking for employment	645	2.0%
Total	32,250	100%

* Multiple responses

TABLE 16
LEADING OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS OF NON-EMPLOYED RESIDENTS INTERESTED IN EMPLOYMENT

Source: YA/WDG Residential Survey, Summer 2002

Occupational Skills	Number	Percent
Clerical & administrative	5,644	17.5%
Highly skilled manufacturing	3,225	10.0%
Hospitality/hotel/restaurant, guest service	2,419	7.5%
Warehousing	2,419	7.5%
Engineering, professional	1,613	5.0%
Hospitality/hotel/restaurant, services	1,613	5.0%
Construction & building trades, trades	1,613	5.0%
Retail sales	1,613	5.0%
Transportation	1,613	5.0%
Other	10,481	32.5%
Total	32,250	100%

- 6. Virtually all of Region 1's non-employed residents who are interested in working have a limitation to entering the workforce.** The most-frequently-mentioned limitation (36%) is shortage of jobs that require the educational and training levels of the non-employed residents. The second-most-mentioned limitation (mentioned by 14% of the survey respondents) is lack of childcare. Physical disability and transportation limitations are also points of significant concern. See Table 17.
- About 24.4% of the non-employed would be interested in working from home via computer.

TABLE 17
WORK OPTION LIMITATIONS OF RESIDENTS INTERESTED IN EMPLOYMENT

Source: YAWDG Residential Survey, Summer 2002

Limitation	Number	Percent
Lack of jobs in area of education/training	11,610	36%
Childcare	4,515	14%
Physical Disability	3,870	12%
Physical Disability	3,870	12%
Other	1,290	4%
No Limitations	7,095	22%
Total	32,250	100%

7. **Approximately 64% of Region 1's non-employed residents would like to receive job training.** In total, over 20,640 non-employed residents would enroll in job training programs as a condition of employment.

TABLE 18
JOB TRAINING INTEREST AMONG NON-EMPLOYED RESIDENTS INTERESTED IN WORKING

Source: YAWDG Residential Survey, Summer 2002

Interest	Region 1	
	Number	%
Interested in Job Training	20,640	64%
Not Interested in Job training	7,095	22%
Did Not Respond	4,515	14%
Total	32,250	100%

8. **Many of the region's employed residents would like to enhance their job skills through training.** Returns from the Younger Associates/WDG residential survey show that 49% of residents currently working would be interested in receiving training to acquire new job skills for career development, which equates to approximately 50,000 residents. These individuals would offer a potential workforce for existing and new companies offering career advancement and training opportunities. Fields of greatest training interest are: management/administration, computer-related professional and support staff, medical services, government, social services and education-related. Table 19 indicates the occupational training most preferred by Region 1's employed residents and the number of residents WDG estimates is interested in training.

TABLE 19
FIRST PREFERENCE FOR RETRAINING AMONG EMPLOYED RESIDENTS:
MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED PROGRAMS

Source: YA/WDG Residential Survey, Summer 2002

Occupation	Number	Percent of Total
Management/administration	4,500	9%
Computer-related support staff	3,500	7%
Medical services	3,500	7%
Computer-related professional	3,500	7%
Government	3,000	6%
Social services	2,500	5%
Education-related	2,500	5%
Total	23,000	46%

- 9. Meridian Community College (MCC) is the largest post-secondary school serving the region.** MCC's campus draws students from neighboring counties and has an enrollment of approximately 3,000 students.
- Table 20 shows the region's community college degrees and certificates conferred in educational programs.
 - The area is also served by East Mississippi Community College (EMCC) in Scooba (Kemper County) and East Central Community College (ECCC) in Decatur (Newton County).
 - Collectively, these three community colleges provide extensive vocational, technical, and health-related programs designed to prepare students for immediate employment. They enrolled almost 8,000 students in 2000 and graduated 1,096 with associate degrees and 310 with certificates.
 - Exhibit B-10 in Appendix B shows the number of graduates by program for the post-secondary educational institutions in Region 1.
 - EMCC has several extensions/ branch campuses (Golden Triangle, Macon Extension, Columbus Air Force Base, and Meridian Naval Air Station) that offer education and training curricula in addition to their main campus in Scooba. The EMCC district also has seven state-funded Tech Prep sites that offer extensive secondary and adult training programs.
 - ECCC serves a five-county district consisting of Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott, and Winston Counties. It offers an extensive array of academic, technical, and vocational programs. It also maintains a Workforce Training Center for area employers.

TABLE 20
MCC DEGREES AND CERTIFICATES CONFERRED IN 2000

Source: U.S. Department of Education

Degree Title	Certificate	Associate's Degree	Total
Nursing (RN Training)	-	103	103
Practical Nurse (L P N Training)	39	-	39
Administrative Assistant / Secretarial Science, General	24	-	24
Nurse Assistant / Aide	21	-	21
Respiratory Therapy Technician	16	-	16
Business Administration and management	-	23	23
Physical Therapy Assistant	-	17	17
Carpenters	-	17	17
Elementary Teacher Education	-	16	16
Graphic and Printing Equipment Operator	-	14	14
Dental Hygienist	-	13	13
Management Information Systems and Business Data Processing	-	13	13
Technical Teacher Education (Vocational)	-	11	11
Totals	102	227	329

10. Mississippi State University–Meridian (MSU) is the only institution in the region that offers bachelors and masters degrees.

Spring 2002 enrollment had 466 undergraduate students and 195 graduate students. MSU offers junior, senior, and graduate level courses. MSU accepts community college graduates who generally reside in Neshoba, Newton, Kemper, Clarke, Leake, Scott, and Jasper Counties. MSU offers curriculum and degrees through its Divisions of Arts and Sciences, Business and Industry, Education, and College of Nursing.

11. Most employers rely on traditional recruiting techniques. Most employers rely upon walk-ins/unsolicited resumes, referrals, word-of-mouth, and newspaper advertising. Twenty-three percent use the state employment agency, 17% recruit from area community colleges and technical schools, 13% use temporary-to-permanent staffing, 5% use Internet-based recruiting, and 8% use employment agencies. (See Exhibit C-1, in the Appendix).

LABOR DEMAND

1. **Currently, the occupations most in demand by local employers are health service professionals, certified teachers and administrators, and applicants willing to work the second shift.** WDG asked employers to identify the positions that they are currently trying to fill. Table 21 identifies the top 12 positions (at the time of the survey) in demand by local employers, ranked by the number of survey respondents. Nine of the twelve positions are primarily clerical and administrative support occupations, while two are manufacturing-related. Management professionals are also in demand by local employers (See Exhibit C-1).

TABLE 21
TOP OCCUPATIONS/POSITIONS CURRENTLY IN DEMAND BY LOCAL EMPLOYERS

Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Labor Demand (currently looking)	% of Total Demand
Health services: professional	29%
Education - certified teachers/admin	14%
Applicants willing to work 2nd shift	8%
Applicants willing to work 3rd shift	6%
Clerical workers: entry-level	4%
Food service: meal prep	4%
Health services: skilled	4%
Food service: wait staff	4%
Accounting Clerks	2%
Professionals/management	1%
Administrative Assistants	1%
Clerical workers: advanced computer skills	1%

2. **In six months, employers anticipate needing to fill primarily second and third shift workers, and clerical and administrative-related occupations.** In order to estimate future demand for various occupations, WDG asked employers to estimate the number of specific positions they would need filled in six months' time. As can be seen in Table 22, the greatest demand for workers are applicants willing to work second and third shifts. Office and clerical-related positions, including clerical workers (both entry-level and those with advanced computer skills), accounting clerks, and administrative assistants also will be in high demand. Increased demand for manufacturing-related occupations is noted, including shift workers, experienced maintenance workers, and maintenance mechanics and electricians.

TABLE 22
ANTICIPATED DEMAND FOR WORKERS IN SIX MONTHS BY LOCAL EMPLOYERS
 Source: WDG Employer Surveys, Summer 2002

Labor Demand (will need in 6 months)	% of Total Demand
Applicants willing to work 2nd shift	19%
Clerical workers: entry-level	12%
Health services: professional	8%
Construction trades: skilled	8%
Applicants willing to work 3rd shift	6%
Clerical workers: advanced computer skills	5%
Food service: meal prep	4%
Health services: skilled	4%
Food service: wait staff	3%
Sales: retail	3%
Maintenance: experienced	2%
Accounting Clerks	1%
Administrative Assistants	1%
Maintenance mechanics/electricians	1%

- 3. In one year, employers anticipate needing to fill primarily second and third shift workers, and clerical and administrative-related positions.** The position most in demand in one year is projected to be applicants willing to work the second shift. Applicants willing to work the third shift are also in high demand. Food service workers and clerical workers (both entry-level and with advanced computer skills), will also continue to be in demand, along with professional and skilled health service workers. Table 23 shows the top positions in demand in one year as reported by local employers.

TABLE 23
ANTICIPATED DEMAND FOR WORKERS IN ONE YEAR BY LOCAL EMPLOYERS
 Source: WDG Employer Surveys, Summer 2002

Labor Demand (will need in 1 year)	% of Total Demand
Applicants willing to work 2nd shift	17%
Clerical workers: entry-level	11%
Applicants willing to work 3rd shift	8%
Health services: professional	5%
Food service: meal prep	4%
Health services: skilled	3%
Food service: wait staff	3%
Education - certified teachers/admin	3%
Clerical workers: advanced computer skills	2%
Management trainees	2%
Maintenance: experienced	2%
Accounting Clerks	1%
Professionals/management	1%
Administrative Assistants	1%
Management: experienced	1%

LABOR QUALITY

- Employers are generally satisfied with the quality of basic skills they see in the workforce.** As seen in Table 24, the median score (on a five-point scale, where 1=poor and 5=excellent) for all basic skills among job applicants was a 3.0. (See Exhibit C-1 in the Appendix.)
- Surveyed employers report a satisfactory work ethic and level of productivity among area employers.** Both work ethic and productivity received a median rating of 3.0 on a scale where 1=poor and 5=excellent. The productivity compared to company's other sites also received a median rating of 3.0.
- Employee turnover and absenteeism were not seen as a problem among area employers.** Average annual turnover as reported by employers in WDG's survey was low to moderate, between 6% and 9%. Daily absenteeism in the region is low. On an average day, less than 5% of the workforce is absent. First year turnover, however, tended to be somewhat higher, ranging from 10-20%.

TABLE 24
EMPLOYER RATINGS ON LABOR QUALITY MEASURES
 (1=POOR; 5=EXCELLENT)

Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Basic Skills of Job Applicants	Average Score	Median Score
Overall basic skills of all applicants	2.9	3.0
Written communication	2.6	3.0
Reading comprehension	2.7	3.0
Arithmetic/math	2.7	3.0
Thinking and judgment	2.8	3.0
Verbal communication/comprehension	2.9	3.0
Team and cooperative skills	2.9	3.0
Bilingual or multilingual skills	1.6	1.0
Overall basic skills of all applicants	2.9	3.0
Productivity and Work Ethic of Employees		
Work ethic	3.2	3.0
Productivity	3.2	3.0
Productivity compared to company's other sites	3.4	3.0
Willingness to work overtime	3.4	3.0

TABLE 24, CONTINUED
EMPLOYER RATINGS ON LABOR QUALITY MEASURES

Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Employee Turnover and Absenteeism (1=0-5%, 2=6%-9%, 3=10%-14%, 4=over 15%)	Average Score	Median Score
Average annual turnover rate	1.9	1.0
Average daily absenteeism rate	1.5	1.0

- 4. Employers report unsatisfactory results on the computer skill levels they require versus the skill levels seen among job applicants.** As shown in Table 25, office employers report that applicant skill levels do not match needed skill levels of applicants. A skills gap is evident in fundamental skills, basic keyboarding, word processing, spreadsheet, database, and accounting software. Programming and other advanced computer skills requirements listed in Table 25 show that the available skills gap narrows for other office, distribution, and manufacturing requirements. The demand for advanced computer skills is modest in the region.

TABLE 25
EMPLOYER RATINGS OF COMPUTER SKILLS IN THE WORKFORCE

Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

	1=no skill needed 5=highest skill needed		1=poor; 5=excellent	
	Average Score Needed	Median Score Needed	Average Score Currently See	Median Score Currently See
Office Personnel (Non-managerial)				
Fundamental skills	3.5	4.0	3.0	3.0
Basic keyboard skills	3.6	4.0	3.1	3.0
Using word processing software	3.3	3.0	2.8	3.0
Using spreadsheet software	2.9	3.0	2.4	2.0
Using database software	2.8	3.0	2.3	2.0
Using accounting software	2.8	3.0	2.2	2.0
Accessing and using the Internet	2.7	3.0	2.6	3.0
A+ Certification	1.6	1.0	1.5	1.0
C++	1.6	1.0	1.4	1.0
CAD skills (e.g., AutoCAD)	1.6	1.0	1.4	1.0
Cisco Certifications	1.5	1.0	1.3	1.0
HTML/web page development	1.6	1.0	1.4	1.0

TABLE 25, CONTINUED
EMPLOYER RATINGS OF COMPUTER SKILLS IN THE WORKFORCE

Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

	1=no skill needed 5=highest skill needed		1=poor; 5=excellent	
Office Personnel (Non-managerial)	Average Score Needed	Median Score Needed	Average Score Currently See	Median Score Currently See
JAVA	1.5	1.0	1.3	1.0
Microsoft Certifications	1.7	1.0	1.5	1.0
Novell-certified training	1.5	1.0	1.4	1.0
Oracle database	1.5	1.0	1.4	1.0
SQL	1.4	1.0	1.3	1.0
Manufacturing Personnel				
Fundamental skills	2.2	2.0	2.0	2.0
Basic keyboard skills	2.2	2.0	1.9	2.0
Distribution Personnel				
Fundamental skills	2.4	2.0	2.1	2.0
Basic keyboard skills	2.4	2.0	2.1	2.0

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

1. **Employers are pleased with the quality of graduates from local secondary and post-secondary institutions.** Surveyed employers reported that the overall quality of graduates and programs offered by local training and educational institutions were satisfactory to very good. Mississippi State–Meridian, Meridian Community College, East Central Community College, University of Southern Mississippi–Gulf Coast and Hattiesburg, and William Carey College in Hattiesburg all received equally high ratings, with a median score of 4.0 where 1=poor and 5=excellent. However, some colleges received more employer ratings than others, as seen in Table 26. This generally reflects the proximity of the institution to surveyed employers. The closer the employer’s location is to the institution, the higher the response rate. Exhibit B-11 in the Appendix shows enrollment and graduation figures by institution.

TABLE 26
EMPLOYER RATINGS OF THE QUALITY OF GRADUATES AND PROGRAMS
OF SOUTHEASTERN MISSISSIPPI TRAINING PROVIDERS
 (1=POOR; 5=EXCELLENT)
 Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Institution	Responses	Average Score	Median Score
Area High Schools	162	3.1	3.0
East Central Community College	105	3.7	4.0
East Mississippi Community College	71	3.5	3.0
Hinds Community College	54	3.6	3.0
Jones County Junior College	62	3.6	3.5
Meridian Community College	115	3.9	4.0
Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College	37	3.5	3.0
Pearl River Community College	37	3.4	3.0
Mississippi State University - Meridian	101	4.0	4.0
Southeastern Baptist College	32	3.6	3.0
University of Southern Mississippi – Gulf Coast	35	3.8	4.0
University of Southern Mississippi -- Hattiesburg	67	3.9	4.0
William Carey College	44	3.8	4.0
Private vendors (e.g. training and development consultants)	73	3.4	3.0

- Employers have limited experience working with the region's educational institutions for general and customized training programs. No employer reported working often or continuously with any of the Region 1 institutions. ECCC had a median score of 3.0 (occasionally); all other institutions had median ratings from 1.0 (never) to 2.5 (borderline occasional usage). This suggests that local training providers are underutilized. They may offer programs that either do not meet the needs of local employers or do not effectively communicate their offerings to the business community. (See Table 27 and Exhibit C-1 in the Appendix.)

TABLE 27
EMPLOYER RATINGS OF UTILIZATION FREQUENCY OF TRAINING PROGRAMS
FROM SOUTHEASTERN MISSISSIPPI TRAINING PROVIDERS
 (1=NEVER; 5=CONTINUOUSLY)
 Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Institution	Responses	Average Score	Median Score
Area High Schools	104	2.6	2.5
East Central Community College	91	2.6	3.0
East Mississippi Community College	67	2.0	1.0
Hinds Community College	56	1.4	1.0
Jones County Junior College	63	1.7	1.0
Meridian Community College	100	2.6	2.5
Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College	54	1.4	1.0
Pearl River Community College	51	1.4	1.0
Mississippi State University - Meridian	85	2.2	2.0
Southeastern Baptist College	50	1.2	1.0
University of Southern Mississippi – Gulf Coast	52	1.4	1.0
University of Southern Mississippi -- Hattiesburg	60	1.8	1.0
William Carey College	52	1.4	1.0
Private vendors (e.g. training and development consultants)	98	2.6	3.0

2. **While employers are generally satisfied with the quality of local training institutions, they do see a need for improvements in some areas.**
- High schools:** work ethic, basic skills (English and math), computer skills, communications, job preparedness, and vocational education.
 - Technical schools, two-year, and community colleges:** basic skills, math, communications, computer skills, electrical, drafting, AutoCAD, allied health programs, maintenance, and electronics.
 - Four-year institutions:** accounting, math, basic management skills, communication skills, advanced computer skills, people skills, and allied health.

3. As noted previously, local residents would like to see additional training programs in order to upgrade their skills. Forty-nine percent of those residents currently employed (roughly 50,000 individuals) and 64% of those not currently employed but interested in employment (roughly 20,640 individuals) are interested in receiving training/education to acquire new job skills as outlined in Table 28.

TABLE 28
FIRST PREFERENCE FOR TRAINING AMONG THE REGION'S EMPLOYED AND NOT EMPLOYED:
ESTIMATED NUMBER OF RESIDENTS, JUNE 2002

Source: YA/WDG Residential Survey, Summer 2002

Field	Employed		Not employed		Total
Did not report code	4,250	8.50%	0	0.0%	4,250
Executive	2,250	4.50%	0	0.0%	2,250
Management/Administration	5,400	10.80%	0	0.0%	5,400
Computer-related					
Professional	3,400	6.80%	3,034	14.7%	3,034
Support Staff	3,700	7.40%	1,218	5.9%	4,918
Education-related	2,550	5.10%	599	2.9%	3,149
Engineering					
Professional	850	1.70%	599	2.9%	1,449
Support Staff	1,400	2.80%	599	2.9%	1,999
Scientific					
Professional	550	1.10%	0	0.0%	550
Support Staff	550	1.10%	599	2.9%	1,149
Financial Services, Insurance, RE	2,250	4.50%	0	0.0%	2,250
Sales					
Non Retail	850	1.70%	0	0.0%	850
Medical Services					
Professional	3,700	7.40%	599	2.9%	4,299
Technician	850	1.70%	1,218	5.9%	2,068
Support Staff	300	0.60%	0	0.0%	300
Social Services	2,550	5.10%	1,816	8.8%	4,366
Business Services	1,150	2.30%	599	2.9%	1,749
Personal Services	0	0.00%	0	0.0%	0
Clerical/Administrative Support	850	1.70%	1,816	8.8%	2,666
Customer Service & Tech Support	300	0.60%	599	2.9%	899
Entertainment/Tourism	1,150	2.30%	0	0.0%	1,150

TABLE 28, CONTINUED
FIRST PREFERENCE FOR TRAINING AMONG THE REGION'S EMPLOYED AND NOT EMPLOYED:
ESTIMATED NUMBER OF RESIDENTS, JUNE 2002

Source: YA/WDG Residential Survey, Summer 2002

Field	Employed		Not employed		Total
Hospitality - Hotel – Restaurant					
Kitchen	300	0.60%	599	2.9%	899
Services	0	0.00%	1,218	5.9%	1,218
Guest Services	550	1.10%	0	0.0%	550
Agriculture/Fishing	1,400	2.80%	599	2.9%	1,999
Mining	300	0.60%	0	0.0%	300
Construction & Building Trades					550
Management	550	1.10%	0	0.0%	550
Trades	850	1.70%	0	0.0%	850
Laborer	0	0.00%	0	0.0%	
Other Trades	850	1.70%	0	0.0%	850
Manufacturing/Production					
High-Skilled	1,150	2.30%	0	5.9%	1,150
Skilled	0	0.00%		0.0%	0
Production	0	0.00%	0	0.0%	0
Warehousing	850	1.70%		2.9%	850
Transportation	1,150	2.30%	0	0.0%	1,150
Utilities	300	0.60%	599	2.9%	899
Government	2,850	5.70%	2,436	11.8%	5,286
Military	0	0.00%	0	0.0%	0
Total	50,000	100%	20,640	100%	70,640

LABOR COST

- Region 1 offers labor cost savings compared to the average state and national earnings in every non-agricultural industry group.** Data on average annual employee earnings allows comparison of the region earnings data to U.S. and Mississippi norms. As can be seen in Table 29, relative to state and national figures, average regional employee earnings are significantly lower in all but one industry sector. Overall earnings in the region are 85% of the Mississippi average and 61% of the national average.
 - Substantial labor cost savings are evident in construction, manufacturing, transportation and public utilities, wholesale trade, finance/insurance/real estate, and services sectors.

TABLE 29
AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS BY INDUSTRY, 2000
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Industry Sector	Clarke Co.	Jasper Co.	Kemper Co.	Lauderdale Co.	Leake Co.	Neshoba Co.	Newton Co.	Scott Co.	Smith Co.	Region 1 Counties	Mississippi	United States
Total	\$21,348	\$21,189	\$19,771	\$25,344	\$18,547	\$23,055	\$21,412	\$20,053	\$23,228	\$21,550	\$25,205	\$35,296
Agricultural Services, Forestry, and Fishing	\$14,148	\$26,623	\$26,262	ND	\$27,588	ND	ND	\$21,863	ND	\$23,297	\$19,242	\$20,269
Mining	\$29,921	\$28,430	-	ND	-	-	ND	ND	ND	\$29,176	\$38,401	\$58,121
Construction	\$15,178	\$20,800	\$19,931	\$23,433	\$17,315	\$37,601	\$16,754	\$21,867	\$20,069	\$21,439	\$27,772	\$36,622
Manufacturing	\$22,931	\$21,486	\$19,064	\$29,392	\$16,159	\$23,885	\$24,586	\$19,170	\$25,848	\$22,502	\$28,506	\$44,778
Transportation and Public Utilities	\$33,234	\$33,423	\$25,127	\$33,720	\$29,631	\$26,980	\$30,250	\$25,548	\$28,932	\$29,649	\$35,276	\$43,643
Wholesale Trade	\$24,691	\$24,113	\$19,763	\$33,918	\$24,307	\$29,023	\$24,276	\$27,006	\$22,783	\$25,542	\$33,399	\$46,740
Retail Trade	\$12,016	\$14,592	\$13,218	\$15,030	\$13,788	\$13,080	\$13,105	\$12,729	\$12,005	\$13,285	\$14,739	\$18,432
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate (FIRE)	\$26,885	\$21,459	\$16,209	\$30,605	\$25,207	\$29,709	\$28,095	ND	\$26,472	\$25,580	\$32,440	\$55,556
Services	\$18,204	\$20,727	\$15,398	\$27,088	\$21,395	ND	\$17,623	\$18,381	\$16,169	\$19,373	\$24,186	\$33,666
Unclassified Establishments	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$37,899
Public Administration	\$20,187	\$20,334	\$23,916	\$25,184	\$21,701	\$29,704	\$32,563	\$24,217	\$21,086	\$22,760	\$27,363	\$38,303

ND = Not disclosable –data do not meet BLS or state agency disclosure standards

- Salaries for both entry-level and experienced workers are low to moderate, according to local employers.** Table 30 shows salary information for which there was sufficient data as reported by local employers. Complete survey data on salaries is in Exhibit C-1 in the Appendix.

TABLE 30
ANNUAL SALARIES OF SURVEYED EMPLOYERS

Source: WDG Employer Survey, Summer 2002

Labor Cost	Responses	Average	Median
Accounting Clerks	37	\$19,720	\$18,720
Administrative Assistants	28	\$23,069	\$21,320
Applicants willing to work 2nd shift	28	\$16,712	\$15,600
Applicants willing to work 3rd shift	16	\$16,868	\$15,600
Clerical workers: advanced computer skills	32	\$18,829	\$19,240
Clerical workers: entry-level	40	\$15,108	\$15,300
Computer Network Administration	10	\$30,064	\$30,000
Computer Operators	15	\$21,380	\$20,800
Construction trades: skilled	10	\$26,292	\$27,060
Education - certified teachers/admin	16	\$28,034	\$26,250
Food service: meal prep	25	\$13,405	\$12,480
Food service: wait staff	14	\$12,403	\$12,480
Health services: professional	23	\$37,028	\$35,360
Health services: skilled	19	\$25,497	\$24,960
Maintenance mechanics/electricians	18	\$25,774	\$24,960
Maintenance: experienced	11	\$21,980	\$22,880
Management trainees	11	\$24,322	\$23,800
Management: experienced	15	\$37,919	\$35,000
Professionals/management	18	\$43,944	\$34,320

3. Benefit programs offered by local employers are modest, as outlined below and in Exhibit C-1 in the Appendix.

- 74% have company-paid health insurance (average percent of premium paid by company: 84.5%)
- 63% have company-paid life insurance (average percent of premium paid by company: 92.4%)
- 45% have pension or retirement plans to which the employer contributes
- 45% have a 401(k) program
- 41% have company-paid long-term disability insurance (average percent of premium paid by company: 80.4%)
- 38% have company-paid short-term disability insurance (average percent of premium paid by company: 81.4%)
- 34% have a tuition reimbursement program
- 33% have company-paid dental insurance (average percent of premium paid by company: 70.5%)
- 13% have company-paid optical insurance (median percent paid by company: 70.5%)
- One employer offered subsidized childcare and four sponsored an organized daycare program.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

1. **Mississippi Workers' Compensation and labor legislation are favorable to employers.** A review of existing Mississippi labor law reveals many elements that are beneficial to employers (see Table 31). There are no statewide restrictions stronger than federal limitations in terms of drug testing, plant closings, ADA legislation, EEO hiring standards, sexual harassment law, mandated parental leave law, and wrongful discharge. Mississippi is a right-to-work state, but does not have an employment-at-will law. (See Exhibit B-12 in Appendix B).

TABLE 31
LABOR LEGISLATION IN MISSISSIPPI
 Source: Mississippi Department of Labor

Employment at will? (Yes or No)	No
If yes, significant restrictions (from employers standpoint)	-
Restrictions on employee drug testing	No
Telephone monitoring restrictions for regulation of productivity (or customer service)	None
Plant Closing Law stricter than Federal?	No
ADA legislation stricter than Federal?	No
Ban on hiring replacement workers during a strike?	No
Striking workers entitled to unemployment insurance?	No
Relatively difficult for an employer to contest and win a Workers' Comp. claim?	No
Relatively difficult for an employer to contest and win an unemployment ins. claim?	No
Right to Work law in effect?	Yes
EEO hiring standards more restrictive than Federal?	No
Sexual harassment laws more restrictive than Federal?	No
Mandated parental leave legislation more generous than Federal?	No
Restrictions on applicant testing	No

2. **Workers' Compensation rates and unemployment insurance rates are competitive with neighboring states.** Mississippi has a relatively low unemployment insurance rate for existing employers and has historically provided very competitive Workers' Compensation rates (see Table 32). Surveyed employers, however, were extremely vocal about rising premiums, insurers leaving the state, and abuse within the Workers' Compensation system. Mississippi may lose its competitive advantage in both areas if reform measures are not implemented.
3. **Employers are keenly concerned about tort liability in Mississippi.** Several companies voiced concerns about the need for dramatic tort reform. One of the repercussions of the current situation is a dramatic increase in medical malpractice insurance premiums and the potential reduction of critical health care services.

TABLE 32
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE AND WORKERS COMPENSATION RATES IN MISSISSIPPI

Source: Mississippi Department of Labor

Unemployment Insurance	
Unemployment insurance rate (avg. existing employers) (2000 estimates by DOL)	1.50%
Unemployment insurance rate (for new employers-- 8-01 ADP)	2.70%
Unemployment insurance taxable base (2001)	\$7,000
Unemployment insurance maximum weekly benefit amount (8-01 ADP)	\$200
Workers' Compensation	
Maximum weekly benefit (1/2001)	\$316
Blended Rate per \$100 payroll-- all mfg. (1999)	\$3
Rate for Clericals Code 8810	\$0
Waiting period (days)	3
Automatic cost of living increase for total disability?	No
Employee allowed to choose any physician?	Yes
Physician list provided by	Employer or employee
Mental stress generally allowed as a compensable injury as a result of cumulative trauma?	No
Carpal tunnel generally allowed as a compensable injury as a result of cumulative trauma?	Yes
Back generally allowed as a compensable injury as a result of cumulative trauma?	Yes
Neck generally allowed as a compensable injury as a result of cumulative trauma?	Yes
Cardiovascular generally allowed as a compensable injury as a result of cumulative trauma?	Yes if cause can be shown
Second medical opinion allowed from physician chosen by employee, but paid for by employer.	No
Coverage for Permanent Partial	Yes

4. **Several labor-related incentives are offered by the state of Mississippi.** Exhibit B-13 in Appendix B lists the incentives available, including corporate income tax credits for new job creation, grants, pre-employment training, and employment tax credits in an enterprise zone. New and expanding employers would benefit from a capital investment tax credit incentive.
5. **Region 1 has a low to moderate union presence.** From 1989 to 1999, there have been nineteen union certifications in the region. See Exhibit B-14 in Appendix B. According to surveyed employers, there are favorable labor management relations in the region. No organizing activity was disclosed, and no strikes appeared imminent.
6. **There are several larger employers in Region 1, but the majority of firms are small.** Some of the largest employers include Pearl River Resort, Choctaw Maid Farms, La-Z-Boy South, and Tyson Foods.

Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C

Appendix D