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'Let's make history together'

1st Corolla produced in Miss. celebrated

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BLUE SPRINGS — Akio Toyoda says this tiny northeast Mississippi town isn't much different than the small Japanese township where his family's business began more than seven decades ago.

That township has since blossomed to a city of more than 400,000 people with the growth of that business, Toyota, the world's largest automaker.

Blue Springs, he hopes, will one day achieve similar growth. The official opening Thursday of Toyota's first manufacturing facility in the state and the 10th in the United States could be the start.

"There have been so many years of twists and turns, but we thank you for being patient with us," Toyoda, president of Toyota Motor

Corp., told thousands of plant employees, state dignitaries and others as the plant rolled a Mississippi-built Corolla off the assembly line.

"Let's make history together."

Thursday's ceremony included blues music, strobe lights, dry ice and cheers that resounded through the cavernous facility. It marked the end of a years-long effort to open the \$1.3 billion plant, the first to build the Corolla, long a staple of the compact-car market, in the United States since a Toyota/General Motors plant in California closed in 2010. The plant can produce up to 150,000 Corollas per year.

Toyota Motor Corporation President and Representative Director Akio Toyoda speaks during an opening ceremony at the Blue Springs plant Thursday.

Written by **Jeff Ayres**

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More than 1,500 people have been hired, and that number should grow to 2,000 by as early as next spring.

"It's a company that thinks long-term," said Gov. Haley Barbour.

"We expect this plant to be around 75 years from now. Our grandchildren's children will be working here."

According to the state, the plant is expected to create up to 17,000 direct and indirect jobs with a total annual payroll of \$500 million.

Those indirect jobs will come from a number of automotive suppliers serving the plant, as well as businesses like convenience stores, hotels and restaurants that could benefit from being near the plant.

At the plant itself, general production-employee pay starts at \$15 per hour, while jobs requiring higher, more specific skills have starting pay of \$20.33 per hour, says Toyota spokesman Victor Vanov.

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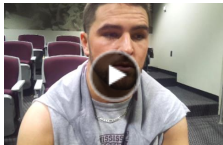


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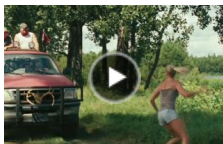
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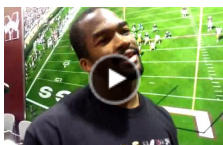
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