

# BALDWIN INSIDER

## 30 Years of Economic Growth: Honoring the Past, Shaping the Future

For three decades, the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance (BCEDA) has been a driving force behind economic prosperity in our vibrant region. As we commemorate our thirtieth anniversary, we reflect on the journey that brought us here, honor our past achievements, and envision a promising future for all of Baldwin County.

In 1994, the organization we fondly refer to as “The Alliance” emerged from a shared vision among the county’s commissioners and chambers of commerce – a vision for a unified approach to economic development that would shape the future of our beloved region of Baldwin County, Alabama. Together, they convened business leaders from across the region, uniting them with a common purpose—to establish an organization that would serve as a catalyst for economic growth and industry diversification.



Donna Watts, President & CEO, South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce

Donna Watts, President & CEO of the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce, recalls the pivotal moment: “We saw the potential for growth and development in Baldwin County, but we knew that it would require a concerted effort from all corners of the community. The formation of the Alliance was a testament to the power of collaboration.”

The need for specialization in economic development became evident as Baldwin County experienced a remarkable transformation, evolving into a thriving hub of industry and opportunity. From Coastal Baldwin to North Baldwin, the county has

experienced exponential growth in both population and economic prosperity. “Our board of directors and organization have worked tirelessly with our partners and supporters to see project opportunities across Baldwin County come to fruition,” Lee Lawson, President & CEO of the Alliance, said. “From the single largest investment in Alabama history to being recognized as one of the country’s top economic development organizations, our successes have been transformative. We show deep appreciation for our predecessors as we look to the past. As we look to the future, we broaden our organization’s vision to encompass new industries, technologies, and challenges, as economic development has advanced so much within the thirty years.”

As we celebrate our 30-year milestone, we acknowledge the remarkable progress made possible through strategic initiatives and partnerships. Looking forward, the BCEDA is committed to fostering a thriving business environment, driving economic growth, and ensuring exceptional quality of life for all Baldwin County residents and employees.

To our valued stakeholders and community partners, we extend our deepest gratitude for your unwavering support. Together, we will continue to write the next chapter of Baldwin County’s story—one defined by resilience, innovation, and shared growth.





# ECONOMIC OUTLOOK FORUM

## The Recap



## ► National and Global Economic Outlook



Gus Faucher, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist, PNC Financial Services Group

As Baldwin County steps further into 2024, the local economy is poised for a promising year marked by growth and resilience. At the Economic Outlook Forum the BCEDA hosted earlier this spring, Gus Faucher, Chief Economist at PNC Financial Services Group, shared valuable insights regarding U.S. and global economies. Faucher highlighted interest rates, investor sentiment, and labor market recovery.

Faucher’s presentation suggested that interest rates, a significant driver of economic activity, appear to have peaked at more than 5%. Initial sentiment from investors and financial analysts suggested that the Federal Reserve would institute multiple interest rate cuts in 2024. That sentiment has changed, and instead of multiple rate reductions, there is no expectation for base-line interest rates to reduce this year. This could impact proactive investment across industry sectors, but other factors are also at play, such as consumer demand and employment.

According to Faucher, wage growth and inflation continue to give the Federal Reserve pause, and he anticipates that they will do what is necessary to stabilize the economy. One can continue to expect structural changes in retail, supply chains, commercial real estate, and the overall labor market.

Faucher also spoke to the importance of the labor market for economic health. “Employment recovery from the pandemic is one of the key components instilling optimism in the U.S. economy,” Faucher said. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. employment is now higher than pre-pandemic levels. This total recovery of employment signifies a return to stability, boosts consumer spending, and drives overall economic growth.

With unemployment rates falling and continued industry growth, the national and local economic outlook for the rest of the year is still promising, albeit not to the degree expected at the start of 2024. The Alliance’s strategic efforts are setting the stage for a thriving economy in Baldwin County and an improved quality of life for its residents.

## ► Need for Industrial Product in Baldwin County



Dr. Walter Kemmsies, Managing Partner, The Kemmsies Group

The industrial sector in Baldwin County is experiencing a significant transformation, especially the logistics corridor in Loxley, which is driven by the increase in industrial projects and the rapid residential growth in the county. As industry expands, the need for strategic infrastructure enhancements

remains at the forefront of the Alliance’s economic development strategy.

Dr. Kemmsies, Managing Partner at The Kemmsies Group, has emphasized the urgency of product development. “We need Class A industrial real estate in this market yesterday,” Dr. Kemmsies said, highlighting the critical demand for high-grade facilities that can support the sophisticated needs of modern commerce and logistics.

Dr. Kemmsies added that there are strategic advantages to proximity to major transport hubs, particularly for e-commerce operations. “E-commerce-related distribution needs to be by a port for processing,” Dr. Kemmsies said. “Stores cannot project inventory like they used to when so much product is going directly to your door.”

Baldwin County is well-positioned to leverage these trends, thanks to its robust infrastructure near transportation routes and ports. However, the region still needs more industrial product. Dr. Kemmsies has projected a demand for as much as 60 million square feet of industrial space in Baldwin and Mobile counties. Only 22 million square feet currently exist, with a surprisingly small fraction meeting Class A standards, proving the need for more industrial product in our market.

The new I-10 bridge and the deepening and widening of the Port of Mobile will also aid in these industrial advancements, further positioning Baldwin County as one of the most accessible regions in the South and the nation.



As Baldwin County advances its industrial capabilities, it focuses on sustaining growth, attracting further investments, and creating more high-value jobs. With a solid foundation, the county looks forward to a prosperous future in its industrial sector, ready to meet the demands of a dynamic global marketplace.

## ▶ Workforce and Quality of Life Positioning Baldwin County as a Prime Site-Selection Destination



Jennifer Fletcher, Senior Manager, Deloitte Consulting

In a compelling presentation at the Alliance’s Economic Outlook Forum, Jennifer Fletcher, Senior Manager at Deloitte Consulting, outlined why Baldwin County is increasingly recognized as an ideal location for business expansion and site selection. With her expertise in economic trends, Fletcher detailed how Baldwin County’s unique

attributes align with the top criteria companies consider when selecting new sites: labor dynamics and quality of life.

Site selection trends have shifted drastically in just the last couple of years. “The top three site location decision factors, according to Area Development, are related to labor costs, availability, and quality of life,” Fletcher said. Baldwin County excels in all three categories, offering competitive labor costs and an abundant, skilled workforce. These economic fundamentals are crucial for attracting businesses prioritizing efficiency and talent retention.

Fletcher also emphasized the county’s living standards as a significant draw. The area’s high

quality of life boosts resident satisfaction and makes it a magnet for skilled professionals looking for a balanced lifestyle.

During her talk, Fletcher highlighted the importance of innovative local initiatives such as “Belong in Baldwin.” “Talent attraction and development initiatives like Belong in Baldwin will be critical in economic development moving forward,” Fletcher said. Programs like this are critical to future economic development, focusing on nurturing and retaining talent within the county. This proactive approach to workforce development ensures that the local labor market continues to adapt and thrive in a competitive economic landscape.

Fletcher’s insights reveal that Baldwin County’s strategic focus on developing its infrastructure, workforce, and community amenities positions it as a top contender in the national arena for site selection.

As the county continues to build on these strengths, it remains an attractive destination for businesses seeking growth and sustainability in a supportive community environment.

## ► Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance Welcomes Baldwin Preparatory Academy Industry Engagement Director



Christina Hellmich,  
Industry Engagement  
Director

Christina Hellmich has recently joined the Baldwin Community + Economic Development Foundation, filling the role of Industry Engagement Director for Baldwin Preparatory Academy (Baldwin Prep). In this position, she will collaborate with industry partners who provide funding and assist in cultivating the curriculum and tools for Baldwin Prep and its students to prepare future generations for careers in Baldwin County.

“We are pleased to have Christina come alongside our team. She will add significant capacity and expertise and be a great asset in developing these industry relationships,” says Lee Lawson, President & CEO of the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance.

Hellmich, a resident of Fairhope, comes from the

Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce, where she focused on workforce development and partnered with Baldwin County schools for almost 15 years. Christina has a bachelor’s degree in communications and has worked in banking, healthcare, and nonprofit industries as a marketing and public relations professional before her work with the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce.

“I am excited to join the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance and engage with industry partners, knowing that we will be collaboratively working to secure the future of Baldwin County’s workforce through Baldwin Prep,” Hellmich said. “It is very exciting to partner with the Baldwin County Public School System in this initiative to change the trajectory for so many people and businesses across our county.”