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Oklahoma Department of Commerce Celebrates 2020 Milestones that Helped State & Economy During COVID-19 Pandemic

With the start of 2021, the Oklahoma Department of Commerce is reflecting on 2020 and the work done to help Oklahoma businesses and communities weather an ongoing global pandemic while also fostering an environment in the state where economic growth will occur.

“This past year presented all of us with diverse challenges,” said Brent Kisling, Executive Director of Commerce. “I am extremely proud of the work we were able to accomplish throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the numerous ways we provided assistance to Oklahomans and Oklahoma businesses while remaining focused on strengthening our economy.”

“If 2020 taught us anything, it’s that we can accomplish a great deal when we work together,” said Sean Kouplen, Oklahoma Secretary of Commerce and Workforce Development. “And while the year was largely memorable for the challenges it brought, I want us to also remember the many ways we succeeded in helping Oklahomans and diversifying our economy through diverse economic development wins. The Commerce team keeps pushing forward to strengthen our state and in 2021, we will continue to focus on bringing new jobs and investment to the state, in addition to helping Oklahoma companies grow, increasing the number of entrepreneurs and startups, and enhancing the job opportunities available to Oklahomans.”

Major accomplishments during 2020 include:

- **Commerce Launched Broad COVID-19 Response Programs:** In response to the stimulus package passed by Congress, Governor Stitt directed the Oklahoma Department of Commerce to administer funding to help Oklahoma businesses impacted by the pandemic. Oklahoma’s agile government structure proved its flexibility in times of crisis. Commerce launched weekly industry webinars with Secretary Kouplen that provided information and resources available to our state’s businesses. Commerce also launched the Personal Protective Equipment portal identifying Oklahoma PPE manufacturers. The Oklahoma Department of Commerce launched 3 assistance programs during the year that distributed more than \$155 million to over 8,500 Oklahoma companies in all 77 counties in the state – the Oklahoma Manufacturing Reboot Program, Oklahoma Bounce Back Program and Oklahoma Business Relief Program.

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- **New jobs and investment in the state.** The Oklahoma Department of Commerce Business Development Team assisted 46 companies with location and expansions projects in 2020, contributing to 4,637 new jobs, attracting \$2.043B in new investment into the state. New or expanding business include: Invenergy, Seaboard, Amazon, Costco, Avara, Cascades, and Dolgen, highlighting the further diversification of Oklahoma's economy.
 - **PAS MRO Relocated Its Headquarters from California to Oklahoma:** In July, PAS MRO, a woman-owned, world-class independent Bearing Return to Service and Component Repair and Overhaul Company, announced plans to relocate its operations from Irvine, Calif., to Bristow, Okla. PAS MRO's relocation will create 37 new jobs and represents an investment of \$3.2 million to the local economy.
 - **American Airlines Announced Investment in Tulsa Maintenance Base:** American Airlines announced it will make an investment in its Base Maintenance facility in Tulsa (Tech Ops – Tulsa). The Tulsa facility is American's largest Base Maintenance facility and is an integral part of operating the carrier's fleet of nearly 1,000 mainline aircraft safely and reliably. Despite the downturn in the airline industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic, American executives said in November 2020 that it is prepared to move forward with Phase I of its upgrades which includes work on hangars, water and sewer line replacement, the reroofing of the facilities maintenance building and replacement of the base's fire system alarm.
 - **Sofidel Group Opened New Production Plant in Oklahoma:** In October, tissue paper maker Sofidel announced the formal opening of its 1.8 million-square-foot facility in Inola. The \$360 million facility is the company's second greenfield investment in the United States and can turn out 120,000 tons of tissue per year. Spread over 240 acres within the Inola River Rail Industrial Park, the facility employs more than 300, a number that is expected to double with a second operational phase.
 - **Skydweller Announced Oklahoma City as U.S. Corporate Headquarters:** At the end of June, Governor Kevin Stitt joined executives from Skydweller Aero Inc., a U.S.-Spanish aerospace company developing renewably powered aircraft for defense and commercial industries, to announce the establishment of the company's headquarters and engineering operations in Oklahoma City and testing and integration in Ardmore. Skydweller plans to increase operations to 120 aerospace engineering and field technician jobs in Oklahoma by 2024.
- **Oklahoma's Automotive Industry Gained International Attention, Commerce Launched Initiative to Grow Industry:** During 2020, Oklahoma, and Tulsa, were the talk of the automotive industry as Tesla considered the state for its next Cybertruck factory location. Oklahoma Department of Commerce tracked 1,970 articles depicting Oklahoma's rising automotive industry in over 50 countries, reaching over 30.5 million people worldwide. Commerce announced the launch of the Oklahoma Automotive Accelerator program and has recruited 11 automotive-related economic development projects since July. One of Commerce's primary goals is to continue to diversify the economy to help mitigate industry-related crises.

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- **Commerce Revamped Site Certification Program to Help Oklahoma Communities Compete for Projects:** In order to better help Oklahoma communities market themselves and their available sites to site selectors and prospective companies, Commerce revamped its site certification program. Norman was the first community to complete certification of a new property, the University North Park Advanced Manufacturing Centre, through the updated site certification program. Once a site receives Site Ready certification, the site receives special designation on LocateOK.com, the state's buildings and sites database. This website is a commonly-used resource by site selectors and corporate real estate professionals and provides them with detailed, site-specific information on properties available for purchase or lease, including proximity to major transportation routes, area labor force statistics, utilities, cost of living details, and business incentives for site selectors' consideration. At the end of 2020, 43 sites statewide were certified through the program.
- **Commerce Led State's 2020 Census Efforts Toward Complete Count:** In 2020, the U.S. was due for the decennial census, which determines the level of federal funding the state would receive for the 10 years beyond 2020. In 2010, Oklahoma had the second lowest response rate of all the states in the US. For the 2020 Census, Commerce worked alongside the Oklahoma Census 2020 Complete Count Committee and an impressive combination of government at all levels (local, regional, tribal, state and federal) and numerous organizations and agencies to spread the word across the state – resulting in a complete count with 99.9% of state households reporting.
- **Oklahoma Main Street Program Gained Recognition While Also Growing and Assisting Small Businesses:** During 2020, the Oklahoma Main Street Program announced the addition of two new programs – both in Tulsa, Okla. The Historic Greenwood District and East Tulsa now join with 30 other programs throughout the state, raising the total of urban programs to five and three associate programs. Another Tulsa Main Street, Kendall Whittier, was named one of three winners of the 2020 Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA), which recognizes communities for their excellence in comprehensive preservation-based commercial district revitalization. And to help understand the negative effects the pandemic had on the small businesses of Oklahoma's Main Street Program, the Oklahoma Main Street Center (OMSC) conducted a survey to measure community impact and gauge where businesses needed additional assistance or training. OMSC then designed training and provided resources to help support the Main Street communities and businesses.
- **Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development Joined Commerce:** As of January 1, 2020, the Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development rejoined the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, bridging a gap to help the two teams work together to strengthen workforce development in the state. The move was part of Governor Stitt's Oklahoma Works Together initiative which launched in late 2019. Oklahoma Works Together aims to leverage existing state resources to develop a plan of action aligned with the needs of business and industry. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Oklahoma Works Together Advisory Team hosted three of its five planned workshops across the state to help communities implement the new plan and to assist with the



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application process for becoming a Center of Excellence. By the end of 2020, nine Centers of Excellence were designated across the state.

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