

Groundbreaking signals a workforce rebirth in Sylacauga

Community leaders break ground on EARTH site at old Avondale Mill

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SYLACAUGA, Ala. (WBRC) - More jobs and more economic opportunities are coming to Sylacauga. Community leaders broke ground on the East Alabama Rural Innovation and Training Hub, or as the site is more commonly known as, EARTH on Thursday.

For Sylacauga this signifies a rebirth of sorts. Seventeen years after the Avondale Textile Mill closed down and thousands lost their jobs, this site will offer work force training to the masses.

“Our celebration today is the beginning and what begins today will benefit our region and our economic health and well-being for generations to come,” said SAFE Executive Director Margaret Morton.

Crews will spend the next several months clearing all the structures above ground and local education leaders are dreaming of all the EARTH site will do for the region.

“As an economic engine this is going to create more and more jobs for the community, and we are going to prepare those students to be prepared to go with the skills and competencies to do those jobs, but to stay local, said Central Alabama Community College President Jeff Lynn.

Educators are not the only ones who will be using the space. Existing businesses will be able to use the space to expand their workforce as well and for one local employee, the site holds a special place in his heart.

“Well this excites me because the potential new technologies that can be taught at this site. These individuals could go to work at Nematik, but it also excites me because I worked for this company that stood here for seventeen years. I was the HR Manager at Eva Jane and Sylacauga finishing when it closed in 2006,” said Nematik Alabama HR Operations Leader John Parrish.

Five years after the Mill closed, a portion of the property was struck by lightning and what remains didn't cast Sylacauga in the best light.

“To see this site go down and see it become what appears to be a warzone was very disheartening. So to see the start of something, I am just excited to see how it grows and develops,” said Parrish.

Once complete, the Sylacauga Alliance for Family Enhancement team will call the site home. It will also feature an education quad with Talladega County Schools, incubation officers, an amphitheater, and more.

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