



Vol. LII—No. 2

SERVING OVER 405,000 MEMBERS

August 2026

Sweet Home Alabama

BY LEE SENTELL, RETIRED DIRECTOR,
ALABAMA TOURISM DEPARTMENT

For many years, Alabama was regarded as a pass-through state. Its interstates were filled with snowbirds heading to Florida for the winter and families traveling to visit relatives in New Orleans.

One organization decided to change that.

The longtime CEO of the Retirement Systems of Alabama envisioned a different future for Alabama. He wanted to give travelers a reason to stop, stay, and experience the state. He didn't start small.

The RSA convinced legendary golf course architect Robert Trent Jones Sr. to come out of retirement and design what would become a remarkable collection of championship golf courses. The result



ROSS BRIDGE, HOOVER

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Ask A Question or GET RUN OVER BY A TRAIN

BY DAVID G. BRONNER



In a little over five decades, the RSA has made great progress thanks to financial support provided by Alabama's governors and state legislators. The leaders of our state have always supported 100% of the full payment of the employer rate as directed by the actuary firm to assure a sound future for state public employees. Member contributions and benefits have been adjusted due to costs and life expectancy, while the financial condition of RSA's pension funds has grown solid for the future.

Health insurance boards (SEIB - State and PEEHIP - Teachers), along with staff from both boards, try to wrestle with hospitals, drug companies, medical staff, and members over costs and utilization to provide a solid, reasonable health insurance program. That is a difficult task, especially when you are not in control of any of those variables!

Alabama's November election will be critical to both RSA PENSION plans and HEALTH INSURANCE programs over the next four years!

Get involved and ask your House, Senate, and gubernatorial candidates upon visiting your location: DO YOU SUPPORT THESE TWO PROGRAMS? If no support, expect problems in the months ahead. ●

"The Music Event" SkyDog: The Shoals Experience

SkyDog: The Shoals Experience, a new music-driven destination event, debuts Aug. 28-30, 2026, in Florence, Al., one of America's most storied recording communities. The premiere of SkyDog Shoals brings highly curated live music, food, film, and storytelling to the Renaissance Shoals Resort & Spa. More information and ticket bundles are avail-

able at www.SkydogShoals.com. SkyDog, endearing nickname of the iconic Duane Allman, honors The Shoals as the birthplace of Southern rock, and celebrates the popular genre as one of Southern culture's most enduring music forms.

Rodney Hall, co-owner and president, FAME Publishing and FAME Studio said, "I've always wanted to create something

that shines a light on this region as the birthplace of Southern rock and as a place where music history still lives. My father, Rick Hall, was part of building that foundation, and Duane Allman earned the name SkyDog within that story. This event honors that legacy and offers people an elevated way to experience The Shoals."

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Sweet Home Alabama

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was the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail—a network of country club-quality courses that remained affordable and accessible to the public. Golfers from across the nation and around the world soon began beating a path to Alabama's door.

The RSA then expanded its vision by developing eight four-star hotels, many featuring European-style spas and fine dining, creating destinations that appealed to far more than golfers. Residential communities followed for those visitors who decided they never wanted to leave.

Recognizing that tourism promotion would be essential, the RSA helped establish a growing network of television stations that showcased Alabama to audiences across the country. The RSA generously shared much of this advertising platform with tourism partners statewide, including the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, Black Belt Adventures, and numerous attractions promoted by the Alabama

Tourism Department.

The state's tourism strategy focused on celebrating what makes Alabama unique. Rather than simply claiming Alabama had great food, the state launched initiatives such as the "Year of Alabama Food" and published its celebrated "100 Dishes to Eat Before You Die" list. Similar efforts highlighted Alabama's trails, parks, music, history, and outdoor recreation.

Through television advertising and coordinated marketing efforts, people across America learned about Alabama's world-class golf, renowned Gulf Coast beaches, rich musical heritage in Muscle Shoals, and growing collection of cultural attractions.

Historical tourism also reached new heights. Visitors from around the world traveled to experience the work of the Equal Justice Initiative and its acclaimed museums and memorials in Montgomery. In recent years, busloads of international visitors from cities such as London and

Berlin have made Montgomery a destination on their travel itineraries.

The results are evident in the numbers. Over the past decade, Alabama's tourism revenues have increased by more than 95 percent, representing growth of approximately \$1.71 billion. Over the past twenty years, tourism revenues have grown by 231 percent, adding more than \$17 billion to the state's economy.

Those dollars represent millions of visitors who may never have considered Alabama until they saw an advertisement highlighting championship golf, unforgettable cuisine, legendary music, civil rights history, or beaches that rival the finest in the world.

They came to discover for themselves the true meaning of "Sweet Home Alabama."

(Editor's Note: The leadership of Lee Sentell was the true success of Alabama tourism.) ●

"The Music Event" Skydog: The Shoals Experience

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SkyDog Shoals is built around the wide, creative legacy of Muscle Shoals: the songs, players, studios, and cultural pull that made the region one of the most influential music centers in the country. Organizers describe the concept as a "cruise ship on land," with the hotel, convention center, outdoor staging, and surrounding experiences designed to function as one immersive weekend.

"I've spent my career in hospitality,

and I'm also an avid concert goer," Larry Bowser, general manager of Renaissance Shoals Resort & Spa, said. "The best music weekends are about more than the set times. They're about atmosphere, discovery, comfort, and the feeling that you're somewhere with a real story. SkyDog Shoals is being shaped with that in mind. The Shoals already has the music, the history, and the soul. This is about bringing those elements together in a way people

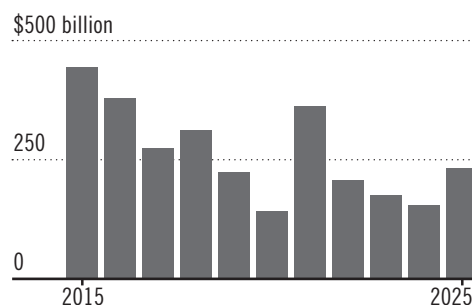
can fully step into."

Beyond the music, SkyDog Shoals will feature regional food, books, film, storytelling, and other cultural programming across the property. At a time when audiences are increasingly drawn to experiences with identity and a strong sense of place, SkyDog Shoals aims to offer a weekend that could only happen in Muscle Shoals. ●

Two Measures of Foreign Investment Tell Different Stories

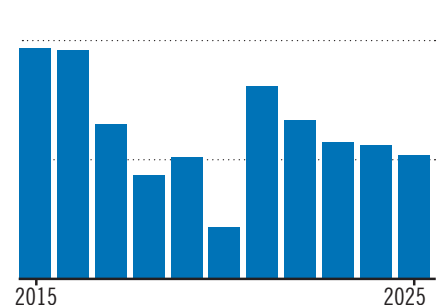
The value of foreign acquisitions and expansions rose in 2025. A broader measure, which includes divestments and other financial flows, dropped.

New foreign direct investment



Note: The new foreign direct investment measure includes only first-year expenditures.

Foreign direct investment in the U.S.



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

The RSA and the Coastal Alabama Economy

BY MARK FAGAN

The RSA has contributed to economic development in Coastal Alabama (Baldwin and Mobile Counties) for the past 50 years. The RSA made loans to maritime, chemical, metal, oil services, banking, and healthcare companies in Coastal Alabama. The RSA developed 90 golf holes, three hotels including nine restaurants and two spas, four office buildings, and four parking decks in Coastal Alabama. The RSA currently owns 2.5 million sf of commercial real estate in Coastal Alabama, which includes 813,000 sf of office buildings, 714,000 sf of hotels (1,017 rooms), 100,000 sf of golf buildings, and 834,000 sf of parking decks. The RSA partnered to develop a residential resort and a senior housing facility in Coastal Alabama. The RSA assisted in recruiting Airbus to Mobile, which led to an increase in the number of aerospace supply companies in Coastal Alabama.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BY THE RSA IN COASTAL ALABAMA

Year	Developed and Owned by the RSA
1993	Magnolia Grove on The RTJ Trail (54 holes and 58,000 sf of buildings)
1999	The Grand Hotel (280,000 sf with 405 rooms)
1999	Lakewood on The RTJ Trail (36 holes and 93,000 sf of buildings)
2005	The Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel (256,000 sf with 374 rooms)
2006	The RSA Battle House Hotel (178,000 sf and 238 rooms)
2006	The RSA Battle House Tower (470,000 sf and parking deck (135,000 sf)
2006	The Colony Residential Resort (some 450 lots)
2011	The RSA Trustmark Building (280,000 sf) and parking deck (107,000 sf)
2015	The RSA Van Antwerp Building (58,000 sf)
2016	2 North Royal Street (20,000 sf) and parking deck (86,000 sf)
Financed by the RSA	
1976	International Paper
1978	Merchants Bank of Mobile
1981	Springhill Medical Center (252-bed hospital)
1988	Rohr Goodrich Aerostructures in Foley
1990	Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach (344 rooms)
1993	Dynamit Nobel Chemical Company (now Evonik)
1995	CIBA-GEIGY Chemical Company (now BASF)
1997	Gulf Coast Exploreum (museum and IMAX Theatre)
1998	IPSCO Saskatchewan (steel recycling)
1999	Kvaerner Oilfields Products
2004	International Shipholding (moved headquarters to Mobile)
2004	Alabama Cruise Terminal (66,000 sf and 500-car parking deck)
2005	Somerby of West Mobile (40-acre, 252-unit senior living facility)
2006	Partnered with City of Mobile for Riverview Plaza Parking Deck (506,000 sf)
2009	Signal International (oil rig repairs)
Recruiting Assistance by the RSA	
1994	Singapore Airlines (now Mobile Aerospace)
2005, 2012	Airbus
2007	Thyssenkrupp

The RSA's golf courses and hotels provide recreational opportunities for tourists and large group meetings. The office space makes Mobile competitive for the service industry and provides space for corporate headquarters. The refurbishment of The Battle House Renaissance Mobile Hotel & Spa, the Renaissance Mobile Riverview Plaza Hotel, RSA Trustmark Building, RSA Van Antwerp Building, and 2 North Royal Street Building replaced rundown properties with attractive downtown buildings. The Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa, Autograph Collection, The Lakewood Club, and The Colony at the Grand in Fairhope help maintain property values and produce consumer spending on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay. The RSA's financing of commercial companies and development of commercial and residential real estate continue to contribute greatly to Coastal Alabama's economy. ●

Alabama Success Story

ASU Receives \$1 Million Grant to Boost Cutting-Edge Research with Advanced Microscope

BY HAZEL SCOTT, SENIOR WRITER/EDITOR; WWW.ALASU.EDU

Alabama State University's College of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (C-STEM) received an impressive \$1,000,000 grant from the Department of War (DoW) to purchase a state-of-the-art Transmission Electron Microscope (TEM), one of the most powerful analytical and advanced imaging instruments, enabling atomic-scale research capabilities.



Dr. Vida A. Dennis

"The acquisition of this new instrumentation elevates the research agenda and capacity for leading-edge research and development at ASU," said Dr. Vida A. Dennis, director of the Center for NanoBiotechnology Research (CNBR) and professor of Microbiology, who serves as the program director/principal investigator (PD/PI).

Her team of expert scientists includes Drs. Emmanuel Tadjuidje, professor of Biology; Qiana L. Matthews, professor of Microbiology; and Rajnish Sahu, CNBR Postdoctoral Research Associate, serving as co-principal investigators (Co-PIs).

Helping faculty and students create groundbreaking discoveries, the new TEM will support work across multiple fields, including nanotechnology, tissue engineering, biology, forensic biology, cancer biology, immunology, mechanical engineering, physics, chemistry, microbiology, virology, parasitology, plant science, and entomology.

"The acquisition of this state-of-the-art equipment will directly enhance ASU students' competitiveness by equipping them with advanced STEM skills for the next-generation workforce, thereby contributing to the DoW's strategic goals of addressing the nation's STEM workforce needs and increasing participation in STEM fields," Dennis said.

Dennis highlighted the broader impact, explaining that outreach programs will introduce K-12 students to innovative technology, providing early exposure that shapes their skills, interests, and educational potential and inspiring future STEM careers.

The TEM is housed in the Bioimaging Core Research Facility within the Department of Biological Sciences and will be accessible to all STEM researchers at ASU, supporting collaboration and speeding high-impact scientific breakthroughs.

"With this new tool, ASU is poised to make significant strides in research and education, fulfilling the DoW's vision of strengthening the nation's STEM workforce," Dennis said.

This is a series of articles about Alabama Success Stories. Please let us know if you have a similar success story you would like to share with the RSA membership. You may contact us at communication.correspondences@rsa-al.gov. ●

You Need a Summer and Fall Break at RSA's Outstanding Hotels, Spas, and RTJ Golf



Member Hotel
Discounts Webpage

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ENJOY YOUR SUMMER & FALL A Special Deal FOR RSA MEMBERS

The Battle House, A Renaissance Hotel \$129

- August 1-3, 9-23, 27-31
- September 1-3, 5-10, 19-24, 26-28
- October 4-6, 15-20, 29-31

The Battle House RSA Spa Package \$244

- August N/A due to Renovation
- September N/A due to Renovation
- October N/A due to Renovation

Riverview Plaza \$119

- August 1-4, 9-11, 14-19, 23-26, 28-31
- September 1-12, 28-30
- October 3-5, 14-16, 29-31

Grand Hotel \$137 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- August 16-18, 23-25 • September 1-2, 20-22
- October 7-8, 25-27

Grand Hotel RSA Golf Package \$209 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- August 16-18, 23-25 • September 1-2, 20-22
- October 7-8, 25-27

Grand Hotel RSA Spa Package \$285 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- August 16-18, 23-25 • September 1-2, 20-22
- October 7-8, 25-27

Renaissance Shoals \$119

- August 2-3, 16-17, 23-24
- September 7-8, 13-14, 20-21
- October 14-15, 18-19, 25-26

Renaissance Shoals RSA Spa Package \$229

- August 2-3, 16-17, 23-24
- September 7-8, 13-14, 20-21
- October 14-15, 18-19, 25-26

Renaissance Ross Bridge* \$129 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- August 5-6, 9, 12-13, 16, 20, 25, 27, 30-31
- September 7-8, 13, 20-21, 23-24, 27
- October 4, 11-13, 21, 25-26

Renaissance Ross Bridge* RSA Spa Package \$260 (plus a 15% resort fee)

- August 5, 12, 31 • September 8 • October 21, 26

Auburn/Opelika Marriott Resort* \$119 (plus a 10% resort fee)

- August 2-3, 9-10, 30-31
- September 1-2, 21-22, 28-29
- October 12-13, 25-28

Auburn/Opelika Marriott Resort* RSA Spa Package \$234 (plus a 10% resort fee)

- August 2, 9-10, 30-31 • September 2, 21-22, 28-29
- October 12-13, 25-28

Prattville Marriott \$109

- August 1-2, 5-6, 14-16, 21-22, 30
- September 1, 6-7, 13-14, 20, 24, 27-28
- October 4, 6, 11-12, 15-17, 30-31

Renaissance Montgomery \$129

- August 2-3, 9-10, 30-31 • September 6-9, 13-14
- October 4-7, 15-16

Renaissance Montgomery RSA Spa Package \$244

- August 2-3, 9-10, 30-31 • September 6-9, 13-14
- October 4-7, 15-16

*Rates available the 1st of the month and
are not applicable to groups.*

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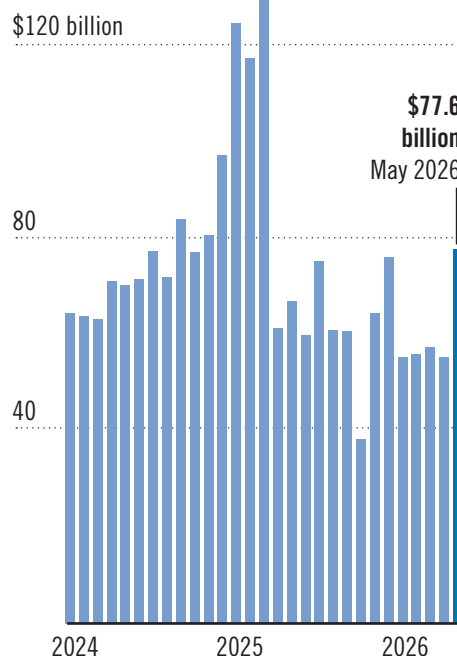
Book Online and Save RSA \$9.

***Visit Member Discounts page for details.**

ERS Board of Control Election Results

Congratulations to Mr. Derrick T. Turner Sr., who has been reelected to the Active State Employee Position, No. 1. He will begin a new four-year term on October 1, 2026. ●

U.S. Trade Deficit in Goods and Services



Source: Census Bureau

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