

The Lone Star State takes a shine to growing industries.

by RUKSANA HUSSAIN

In Gear

Texas is second in the nation in terms of manufacturing employment. Within the Texas manufacturing workforce, more than 27 percent are concentrated in three sectors, two of which are fabricated metals (more than 14 percent) and machinery manufacturing (more than 13 percent). The two are also among the top five manufacturing sectors for job growth. Texas manufacturers contributed \$211 billion to the local economy in 2012. And many of them are choosing to fabricate expansions in the state.

One such company is COOPER Valves, manufacturing high-quality exotic and nickel alloy valves in the US since 1939. The company moved from

a 10,000-sq.-ft. manufacturing warehouse and a separate office building to a 60,000-sq.-ft. facility where a fifth of the space serves as corporate headquarters and the rest is a manufacturing shop and warehouse. Their choice for the move was Stafford, located mostly in Fort Bend County in the Greater Houston area.

“Years ago, we identified this area because it has the most tax advantages to locate a business that has extensive inventory,” says Ginger Restovic, president, COOPER Valves. “The whole city of Stafford was set up to be an industrial hub. Many of our competitors are here. Most are major manufacturers with huge distribution warehouses. Houston in particular has more manufacturing

Liberty Lift has been expanding at multiple sites in Texas, including this location in San Antonio.

Photo courtesy of Liberty Lifts



than any other city in the US — that is one of our best-kept secrets. We are always on the leading edge of economic development here.”

Fabricated metals manufacturing was Texas’ 11th largest export sector in 2012, with exports valued at \$9 billion — up 19 percent from \$7.5 billion in 2011. “Houston is still the center in the world for anything related to energy production, so here we are in the middle of the energy corridor,” says Restovic, adding that the majority of the company’s global business is within the Americas.

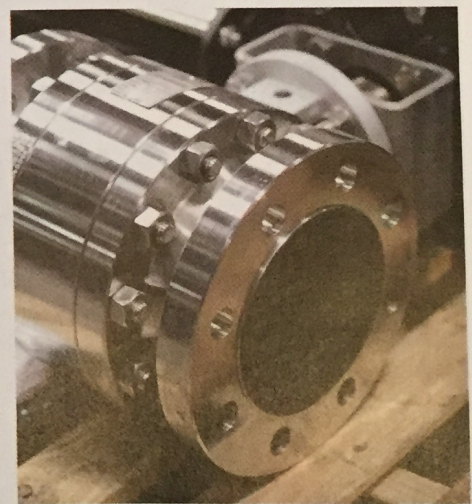
Freeport Status

Given that Stafford was a sought-after area, COOPER Valves had limited choices but found a sweet spot just off of the Southwest freeway, Interstate 69. “The city

of Stafford, because it’s all built around industrial businesses, is very savvy. And they are very conscious about environmental laws and protection,” Restovic points out. “Stafford is also the only triple Freeport zone around here.”

Several Texas cities offer triple Freeport tax exemptions — tax incentives at the city, county and school level — to attract companies. And a number of others are actively considering it.

It has certainly attracted foreign investments to the Stafford area. Restovic is only too happy to welcome them. “I am energized to think that more people want to set up advanced manufacturing here. Foreign investments are a good thing.” Foreign companies also in the manufacturing industry in Stafford



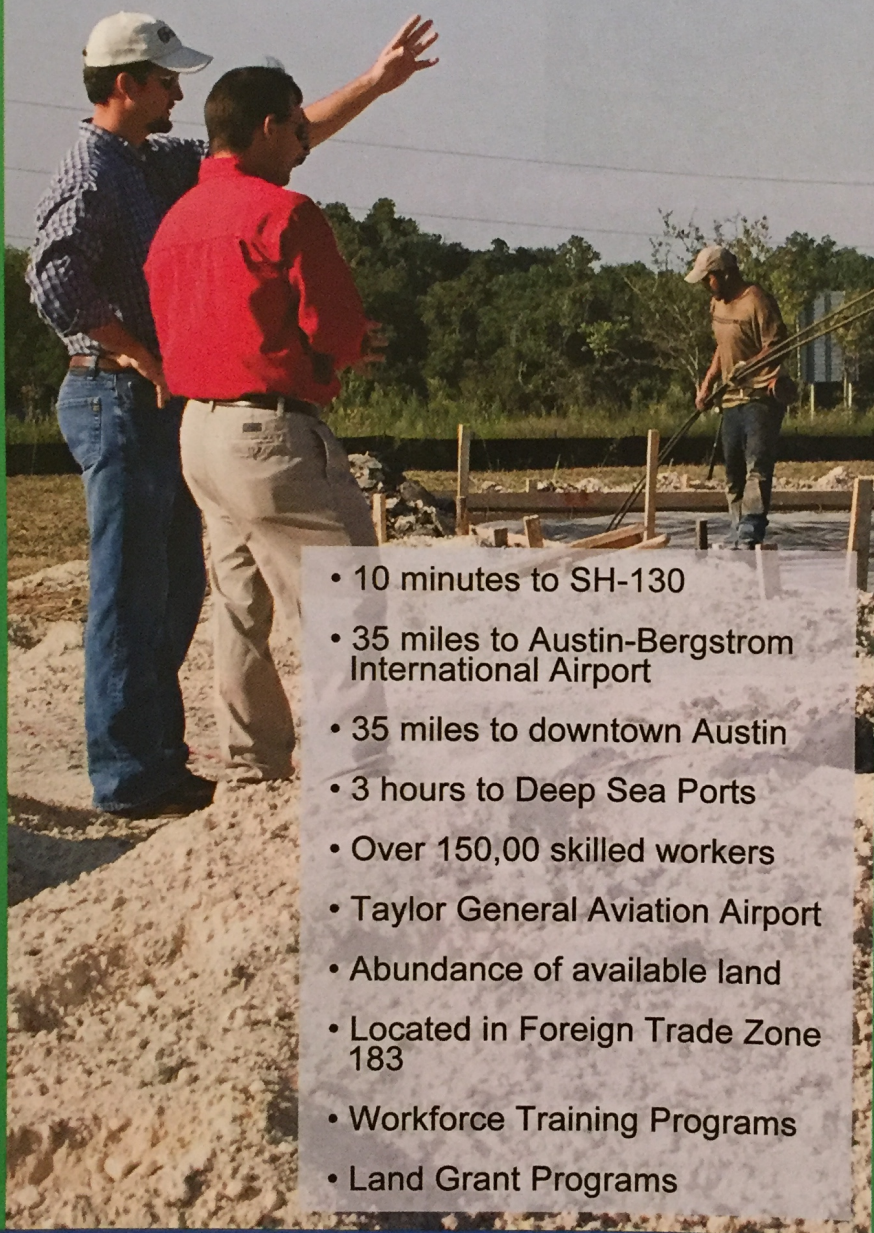
Top: Freshly painted COOPER handwheels.

Center: A COOPER Valves machinist configures a CNC machine.

Bottom: A COOPER Accuseal Critical Service Valve (CSV) with actuation awaiting final inspection.

Photos courtesy of COOPER® Valves

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include France's Tornier Inc., Israel's Microwave Networks Inc. and Matheson Tri-Gas from Japan.

Port a Boon to Business

The business benefits in Texas are many, from low costs and tax exemptions to startup support, a strong and large labor pool and proven logistics assets. One maker of equipment knows those benefits well, and keeps finding new places across the state to invest.

Houston-based Liberty Lift Solutions is an artificial lift company focused on beam pumping systems, with operations across the state in Fort Worth, Midland and San Antonio. The company already has its sights set on another space in East Texas.

"We currently have about 30 people and probably within the next eight to 12 months, we will staff up to about 45 people," says Bobby Evans, president and CEO, about the firm's recently expanded Midland operations. "We bought an existing old yard with an old office and completely renovated it to a new manufacturing center. It's been under construction for about 14 months now."

Evans says operations are centered on where all their clients are. Proximity to most of the drilling and producing activity was a big part of the move to Midland and San Antonio.

"The property and the facilities were very difficult to come by, but we needed to be in the area," he says.

Texas is home to a wide variety of industrial machinery manufacturing for mining and construction. This runs the

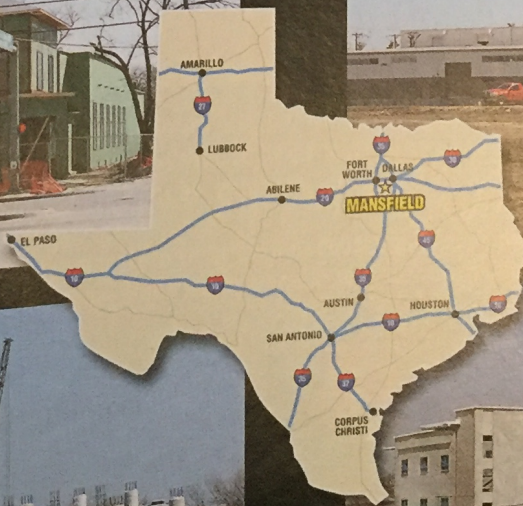
“Houston in particular has more manufacturing than any other city in the US — that is one of our best-kept secrets.”
 — Ginger Restovic, President, COOPER Valves

gamut of offerings from pumping equipment, power transmission conveyor systems, and air and gas compressors to turbines, semiconductor machinery and oil and gas field equipment. Although Midland offers several incentives including property tax abatements, foreign trade zone and Freeport tax exemptions, it's the Houston port that ranks high on the list of benefits when doing business here. “We do get a significant amount of our parts from overseas and

bring those parts into Midland to assemble, so the Port of Houston is very good for our business. From a logistical standpoint, the proximity to Midland is an advantage,” says Evans. Other companies with business operations in Midland include Wood Group PAC from UK, Omni Labs from Switzerland and Australia's CORPRO. Founded in 2012, Liberty Lifts employs almost 125 staff across their offices in Texas as well as in other locations in the US,

including California, Wyoming and North Dakota. Evans is quick to note that Texas is much more business-friendly. “I am a born-and-bred Texan, so I am a little bit biased when it comes to doing business here,” he admits, “but we found that Texas is, by far, much easier to do business in than some of these other states that also have so much activity going on. It is just much friendlier to be able to start businesses and do business in Texas.” ★

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