

Oklahoma Innovations Radio Show

Air Date: August 8-9, 2015

Guests: **David Stewart** and **Tonya Backward**, MidAmerica Industrial Park

>> From the OCAST Radio Network, this is *Oklahoma Innovations*, a weekly science and technology radio magazine, brought to you as a service of OCAST, the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology. OCAST is the state's only agency whose sole focus is science and technology. The OCAST mission is to identify and fund promising research and technologies that allow Oklahoma to compete in a global market economy from our own backyard. This program features some of Oklahoma's most gifted scientists, inventors, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, educators and business leaders who all have one common goal: developing technology based economic growth for all Oklahomans. Now, here are your hosts Gary Owen and Tessa North.

[Music]

>> Thank you for joining us on this week's edition of *Oklahoma Innovations*. Gary and Tessa, coming to you this week from a community I don't think we've ever visited in all the time that we've been doing *Oklahoma Innovations*. We are in Pryor, Oklahoma, this week and we're coming to you from the state's largest industrial park, MidAmerica Industrial Park, and you would question, well, why are you doing that? Well, you're going to find out because there's some really cool manufacturers and companies here and, I'll tell you what, Pryor's a booming town. I had no idea all this was going on.

>> I did not have any idea, either. I've never been to Pryor before and so I didn't really know what to expect, but, man, once we came out here, this park is pretty impressive. It's huge.

>> Yeah, it's amazing. And some impressive companies here. We're going to be talking to a gentleman who is their Chief Administrative Officer and Trustee, David Stewart, and Tonya Backward, who is Workforce Development Coordinator. But first we have not only Tessa but we also have Leah Malloy, who is with OCAST. You two girls have - you work in tandem together at OCAST. Of course, Leah, welcome back; you've been on the program before.

>> Thank you. It's good to be here, thanks.

>> And you work at the state capital for OCAST, right?

>> I do. I'm taking a break from the capital right now.

>> So you two are excited about the Oklahoma Technology Showcase coming up. Talk to us about that.

>> That's right. The Showcase is - this is going to be our fourth annual Oklahoma Technology Showcase and it's scheduled for August 26 at the NSU campus in Broken Arrow. Leah and I are helping to plan various parts of it. Leah is doing a lot of coordination with the companies that will be presenting. We're going to have six companies that will be presenting. They will give really brief, like 10 minute or less, high impact, high energy presentations, so think like a Ted talk. There will be time for question and answer, I believe, after each presentation. And then perhaps best of all is there's a ton of networking time built in. so Leah do you want to talk a little bit about perhaps the schedule for the day?

>> Sure, absolutely. It's kicking off with A Million Cups. It's a Tulsa entrepreneurial company and they're going to have some people there who are going to talk about their businesses and ideas. It should be an exciting way to start off. The mayor of Broken Arrow will be there welcoming everyone. Lunchtime, the keynote speaker is from Google, so that should be exciting, which is a company here at MidAmerica. There will also be a robotics show at the end, so pretty exciting. Should be a fun day.

>> I think that will be really neat. In addition to all the events we have going on, all the speakers that will be talking about what their companies are doing, we will have three undergraduate student interns who will be presenting about their internships over the last year and they'll be competing for scholarship money. So that will be really exciting. It's always really cool to see what these very bright students are up to and the really neat projects that they're working on. We mentioned that there are a lot of networking opportunities available. There will be sort of like a tradeshow set up, so anybody who's interested in learning more about the companies that are presenting as well as other companies that maybe won't be onstage presenting but will have, you know, services that they can offer to high tech companies in the area, there will be tables set up and booths to talk to various service providers and cool companies in not only the Tulsa area but from all over the state.

>> Okay, so to the listeners, why is this important to the state to have an event like this?

>> It's great to come and listen to these companies. They really talk about their struggles, their journey, what they've been through, and what they've had to do to get to where they are now. They're all successful and doing well and they're all very excited to talk about their stories. So it's a great opportunity to listen to them. Plus networking opportunities there are always good. And a lot of our companies, they're all in various stages. Some of them are going to be very small, early stage startups, and then we have companies presenting that have been around for decades. So you really have a whole gamut of experience here that you can sort of tap into.

>> But to the audience, just so you know, what this showcase is about is some up-and-coming technology companies who eventually could become a major contributor to the state's economy because of their growth and adding new hiring jobs and so forth and the technologies that are released, that are showcased here, are pretty unique.

>> Absolutely, yeah. We've got, one, you know, we've got a couple companies that may end up being like the next eBay type of company.

>> You never know.

>> Very interesting stuff going on, so you get - for more information about the showcase, check out the OCAST website at www.ocast.ok.gov and on the top of our website there's a big banner that says 2015 Oklahoma Technology Showcase. You can click on that and find out more information about registering as well as the agenda.

>> Now, Leah, I want you to talk a little bit to our audience about what's going on at the state capital, what's on the agenda, how OCAST fits, and what your position is. Because I know that you integrate with the legislators a lot and you keep them up-to-date with what's going on with the projects and clients at OCAST. I want you to tell our audience a little bit about your job and why that's important to them.

>> Okay. Right now, the capital is pretty quiet. There's actually a lot of moving going on because of the construction. I don't know if you've heard about that, but there's a big project

right now, so it's quiet at the moment. They are compiling a list of interim studies. There's, I think, about 120 of them out there from both the House and the Senate, so they're working on narrowing those down. They'll start in September, October, something like that. So it'll kind of start ramping up again about then. Other than that, we try to plan visits as a legislative team out to districts and try and get the legislators to go to companies and businesses in their district so they can see what's going on. That's important for them to know what these businesses are doing and how many employees they have and just all the good things that they're doing.

>> And like any state agency, obviously, budgets are always on the docket. People are - every representative of a state agency is trying to lobby for more money, but unfortunately there's only so much money based on tax revenues. Talk about how - what the reaction is at the capital and what OCAST is doing for the state.

>> We actually did very well this past session. Every agency pretty much got a cut, so it was just a matter of who got the worst of it. And we did pretty well. We came out better than most, so we were real happy about that. OCAST has a great story to tell, so it's just a matter of us making sure that the legislature knows our story and I think we've done a good job of that and we'll just continue.

>> And when you look at the investment we're making in tax dollars, the return, what is our average return now?

>> Over the past 20 years or so, it's been 20:1.

>> Wow.

>> Some years it's better than that; some years it's not as good. So average is 20:1.

>> Well, we're glad we have someone like you at OCAST that's keeping us informed like that. We've got to have her back on the show. She can - during the legislative sessions, she can kind of bring us up-to-date on, you know, what's going on through the year.

>> Absolutely. I mean, I know there's a ton going on at the capital up there, so we don't see Leah a whole lot during session, so it'd be hard to get her, I bet, but it'd be really interesting to hear what she sees every day up there.

>> I'd be happy to.

>> Okay, well, thanks for being on the show this week. She happened to be in the Pryor area because of some things going on, so we just grabbed her and said, hey, come along. Alright, let's move on and meet the representatives of MidAmerica Industrial Park, Oklahoma's largest industrial park, and we want to introduce you to David Stewart. Once again, he is the Chief Administrative Officer and Trustee. And one of his colleagues, Tonya Backward. She is - that's an interesting name, Tonya Backward - Workforce Development Coordinator and she wears multiple hats and we're going to find out a little bit about what she does here momentarily. But let's, first of all, talk to David. Nice to have you on the program. You have quite a responsibility here.

>> Well, it's nice to be here and, yes, it's the largest park. In fact, it's the largest park in the region and one of the third largest in the United States.

>> Tell us a little bit of the history, how this started and how it has evolved to where we are today.

>> Well, that's really part of what makes the park unique is that how it evolved. It was actually a black powder munitions plant for World War II.

>> Really?

>> Yeah, operated by E.I. du Pont. Du Pont started as a gunpowder manufacturer, so -

>> I did not know that.

>> Yeah, so they operate the plant, paid for by the government, and then eventually of course it was disbanded and all those assets were transferred into a public trust of which I am a trustee and we are managed by five trustees. You know, any decision that's made is made by us. And so the purpose is to use those assets in a way that benefits Oklahoma and generate business, and that's what we're all about.

>> So are there are other industrial parks like this in this part of the country that are like this? For example, I'm sure Texas has, but Kansas, Arkansas, Missouri?

>> Well, when you say "like this," I don't think there's any like this.

>> Really?

>> Yes, because we have such a wide range of assets to use. We have ongoing revenues, we're fully staffed, and we have our own incentive fund. So when you look at all those characteristics, I just don't think it exists anywhere else.

>> What's the acreage of this development?

>> It's a total of 9,000 acres.

>> Wow.

>> And half of that is occupied and the other half is, of course, that's what we're doing, trying to fill it up.

>> For new development.

>> Absolutely.

>> How many companies are out here right now?

>> We have about 80 and 3,400 employees come out to work here every day, so it's an economic engine, yeah. 8:00 and shift change, you better get out the way because everybody's moving.

>> Are these typically - is there a wide variety of the types of jobs that are available out here everywhere from, you know, perhaps like a clerical type of job to high-skill, high-wage type of job?

>> Absolutely. Yeah, we have some companies, Orchids, for example, they're headquarters is here and they have - they run their whole operation here. Other companies have divisions, like du Pont, you know, they have an agri-nutrition-soy manufacturing plant. So they would have more manufacturing type jobs. And then we have, of course, Google and they would have some high-end kind of techy jobs. So it's really a, you know, a microcosm of a business out here. We just have from A to Z and that's what makes it so interesting.

>> Now, a lot of people listening to this would say “why Pryor for the location?” Obviously, we know because of why it started, but why this area?

>> Well, you know, if you look back about why they would put the munitions plant here, it’s -

>> It’s way out in the middle of nowhere.

>> It’s hard to get to. I mean, when you go [crosstalk]. And then it’s by the Grand River, so the water asset was very important and the crossroads, you know, the highway crossroads of 69 and 412. So -

>> And you’ve got rail that goes through here.

>> And we’ve got U.P. Rail. So this facility was actually built to operate, you know, a city because they had all the workers, they had the barracks, they have - actually, there’s even a golf course for the officers back then.

>> No kidding.

>> Absolutely. That’s what makes it so complete and so unique.

>> When you talk about economic growth for the area of Pryor, or a lot of people call it Pryor Creek, I guess it’s officially the community name, I’m sure it’s done quite a bit to this area over the years.

>> Yeah, absolutely. I mean, when you look at especially recently in the recession, we’re one of the few bright spots in the economy because we actually are putting money back into infrastructure and building at a time when most companies are pulling back and putting their cash on the sidelines and we’re putting it back in to get ready for the return, you know, when companies get ready to expand.

>> We’re talking with David Stewart. He’s with - he’s representing MidAmerica Industrial Park, Oklahoma’s largest industrial park centered right in Pryor, Oklahoma. Who would know that? We’re going to take a little break. We’ll come back and we’re going to bring to the microphone Tonya Backward and find out what she does when we return on *Oklahoma Innovations*.

[Music]

>> Pancreatic cancer’s the fourth leading cause of cancer deaths with a median survival range of only six months. As an oncologist, I see far too many families suffer from the effects of this terrible disease. We need better treatment options for patients.

>> With the support of the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology, the researchers at Core Biotechnology have what they hope will eventually be a treatment, even a cure, for pancreatic cancer. They have identified a protein that if blocked may prevent tumors or keep them from growing. With help from OCAST and I2E, the team at Core was recently awarded an SBIR research grant to enable them to continue their research and move closer to a treatment for pancreatic cancer. If you’re a researcher or a small business in Oklahoma and are considering applying for a Federal SBIR funding, contact OCAST toll free at 866-265-2215 or visit us on Facebook or our website at OCAST.ok.gov.

>> Now in its nineteenth year, this is *Oklahoma Innovations*, on the OCAST Radio Network.

[Music]

>> Coming to you from Pryor, Oklahoma, and the MidAmerica Industrial Park. They're labeled as the largest industrial park in the state. And now we want to bring to the microphone Tonya Backward, who is Workforce Development Coordinator, but I understand you wear a lot of hats. Is that right?

>> I do. I do wear a lot of hats.

>> Tell us about your job and what you do here.

>> I was hired as the Workforce Development Coordinator here for MidAmerica Industrial Park. So Workforce Development means so many things to so many different people. So that could be talking to our youth about the career opportunities and training programs that we have available or just helping someone find a job, or as far as the Workforce section when we're trying to recruit additional business to the park, then of course that's a very important role to play as well.

>> It's nice that you get into the educational system because you know a lot of, particularly in the high school level, a lot of students don't know where they're going if they're not going to college, or if they're going to college and they want to go to a trade school, they don't know what kind of fields they want to go into, what kind of opportunities are in their home base. And so that's nice to have someone like you go out and talk to them about job opportunities.

>> Yeah, and that's so true, and that's one of the things that we have found to be an issue as far as the jobs that we have available and the training programs. So many of our students in the high school program or in the high schools aren't aware of what we have available here at MidAmerica. There are - they may have grown up in the area and know that we're here, but, like I said, aren't aware of the different opportunities that we have. So one of the things that we do as far as outreach is to go into the schools to educate the kids of the different things that we have available here.

>> Yeah, in fact, one of the things that we brought to the schools is integration of the businesses and the knowledge about the jobs back to the schools, to the teachers. The teachers actually go on plant tours. We have the kids that go on plant tours. And we have the CEOs and some of the employers providing speakers that go back into the school system. So we believe long-term that's critical to the success of our kids and getting them productive and involved.

>> Well, you give them a little direction, too, when it comes to curriculum choices and things like that to prepare them for college or trade, right.

>> Absolutely. And jobs have changed so much over the years that they really don't understand what jobs are today versus what they were yesterday.

>> Now, what about - you know, one of the things you work on, Tessa, is intern partnerships. I wonder how something like this would work in an application like that.

>> That's right. one of the aspects of our intern partnerships program actually gives teachers an opportunity to go and have internships at companies like the ones you might find out here at MidAmerica Industrial Park because we realize that it is so important, certainly for the students to have the opportunity, but if the teachers aren't having the opportunity to see what's going on now in real time, it's kind of hard for them to bring that back to the classroom. So I think - I mean, we have found the same thing at OCAST. That is really a critical aspect to making sure that we get well-trained students for today's jobs and teaching the teachers as well.

>> So, Tonya, what do you find also challenging? We heard you wear multiple hats. I guess you do a little bit of marketing, so I'm sure some of that's - is that just for the administrative offices here or is that for the entire complex?

>> That's both. We have a lot of companies located here, like Dave had mentioned, and so many of them that have great jobs available and finding the people for those positions can be challenging sometimes. So working on marketing for our companies that we have housed here, but then also with the unemployed, underemployed, and our students that we have here in the area as well.

>> And one of the things our listeners need to understand is many of these companies are looking for high-skilled, highly-trained skilled employees because a lot of these are very high-tech jobs and they're not easy to recruit into an area like this. Am I right on that, David?

>> That's correct. In fact, if you look at why companies move or expand or relocate, availability of qualified workforce is one of the top two or three reasons. If you can't - if you don't have workers, you can't expand. So that's why one of our key initiatives is to develop the Workforce Development Center that, you know, we can talk about later, but that's a major investment by us because we see it as a gap.

>> So would you say the biggest challenge you have for your partnerships out here is finding high skilled, highly trained employment, I guess, recruitments?

>> I would say yes.

>> Yeah. And where do you go? Do you go out of state if you can't find them in Oklahoma? How do you recruit or where do you find people?

>> Well, I think they're here. I think we just have to provide the vehicle, the knowledge, and the education about what is here and the assets that Oklahoma has to bear just like OCAST. I mean, most people don't know what's available, and so this career center is going to be designed to realign all those services in a way that people can actually get them in the right time in their lives to get a job. And that's the - you know, that's the goal.

>> And this career center that you just mentioned, that is the MidAmerica Career Center, correct? And this is a relatively new collaboration?

>> Yes, it's - because of this strategic initiative that we felt that we needed to, you know, a gap we needed to fill, we dedicated \$10 million to develop a state-of-the-art best in class career center that will be a collaboration between our companies, MidAmerica, the community, all of our higher education institutions that are here, and the high schools.

>> So you're reaching every aspect of anybody who might live in Pryor or come to Pryor.

>> Absolutely, and in collaboration. We have this advisory council made up of these stakeholders and that we've been meeting for a year and a half trying to figure out what, where the gaps are, what do we need to do, and this is not going to be - this is the system. You know, we're going to take a whiteboard, we're going to redraw it, and we're going to make it successful. And that's what's so fun about this project.

>> So this will be an actual physical location where people can go and receive training?

>> Yes, it's a 1,000-square foot building that we dedicated to the project.

>> Very cool, and it's open to anybody in the community who's looking to brush up on some skills or receive additional, like, certifications?

>> Yeah.

>> Okay, very cool.

>> And, of course, that's what Tonya does is coordinate that. I just come up with the idea; Tonya does the work.

>> You do all the legwork, huh?

>> It's the fun work, for sure.

>> It sounds like it would be really awesome working with all those collaborators. And the Cherokee Nation is involved with this as well?

>> Absolutely.

>> Very cool.

>> Of course, I'm Cherokee, so I'm very familiar with those services and, you know, very few places have taken all of these services and tried to align them, you know, in a way like this. So we're excited.

>> That's great. Coming to you from the MidAmerica Industrial Park in Pryor, Oklahoma. Stay with us. We've got a lot more to learn and if you're a businessperson out there, you may want to be listening closely to our next segment when we return on *Oklahoma Innovations*.

>> If you enjoy listening to this program, tell us. Better yet, like us on the OCAST Facebook page. There's more *Oklahoma Innovations* to come on the OCAST Radio Network.

[Music]

>> When I invented my new product, I faced a lot of challenges, from securing capital to recruiting qualified employees. It's a very complex path from innovation to the marketplace and I needed some help navigating the process.

>> The Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology and its strategic partners, the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance and I2E, help entrepreneurs. They support existing and startup companies so they can succeed and create jobs, increase per capita income, and grow the state's economy. In its 26-year history, OCAST has funded nearly 2,500 research projects and provided support to hundreds of Oklahoma-based companies. The investments made in these businesses yield high returns for our state by strengthening and diversifying our economy. Advancing innovation is investing in a positive future. That's what OCAST is all about. For more information, call OCAST toll-free at 866-265-2215 or visit us on Facebook or our website at ocast.ok.gov.

>> I'll graduate from college soon. I wanted real world experience that would make me stand out to potential employers. That's what I like about my internship. It's preparing me for a competitive job market.

>> With the support of the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology, more than 500 Oklahoma students have interned with science and engineering companies. OCAST's intern program help students connect with mentors, operate instruments not available in the classroom, build confidence, and gain practical experience.

>> The OCAST internship gives me the opportunity to put into practice what I study in the classroom. It's a great learning experience and a chance to work with topnotch professionals.

>> Internships play an important role in connecting Oklahoma's brightest students to quality technology jobs in Oklahoma. Creating opportunities, that's what OCAST is all about. for more information, call OCAST toll-free at 866-265-2215 or visit us on Facebook or our website at ocast.ok.gov.

>> Research and development, technology transfer and commercialization, creating high paying jobs in Oklahoma is what OCAST is all about. this is *Oklahoma Innovations* on the OCAST Radio Network.

[Music]

>> Welcome back to *Oklahoma Innovations*. We are coming to you from Pryor, Oklahoma, the MidAmerica Industrial Park, labeled the state's largest industrial park. Our guests, David Stewart, Chief Administrative Officer and Trustee, and Tonya Backward, who's their Workforce Development Coordinator. How do you recruit business to an area like Pryor? How do you do that?

>> Well, you do it in several ways. Of course, the Internet is very popular and our website is important for that. we also have an outreach program where we talk to site selectors about MidAmerica and our particular assets and what makes us unique, what industries we fit in. so once these site selectors understand we're on their radar screen, if you will, then when a project comes up they think of MidAmerica. We want to be top in mind.

>> Go ahead.

>> What sort of incentives does the park offer for companies who are looking? I know the state offers incentives for companies looking to relocate here. What sort of incentives do you guys offer?

>> Well, we have our own incentive fund, so when you take what the state has, we actually can invest in infrastructure, we can provide road enhancement, infrastructure enhancement, we can provide reduced price on land. And another benefit of being here is the ongoing service that you have from our staff. So it's not like you come in, you buy a piece of land, and, you know, you're forgotten about. you know, we are constantly in contact with them. We help with legislative issues. We help them with infrastructure issues. All kinds of things, you know, and that's something that's very unique.

>> Is - that's not something that's normal? It seems like more of a little bit of concierge type service around here.

>> Right. That's a good idea. I may use that.

>> Very cool.

>> There you go. Write that down, Tonya. You're going to need that later. So when you talk about the incentive to come here, what kind of - what does the community and what does midland offer in terms of incentives to move here?

>> Well, there are some intangible incentives, and one is the decision-making process. We have five trustees, we can make decisions quickly, we don't have any zoning or permitting.

>> Oh.

>> Wow.

>> So if you're in California or you're on the East Coast, that's a very welcoming comment because the regulatory environment is very easy to work through. We don't have any unnecessary process here. You want to buy a piece of land today? You can build the next day. And that's unheard of in the industry.

>> Boy, I guess.

>> That's one primary benefit. We operate our own water plant, so we have a large supply of good water, treated water, at low price. That's another benefit. We have the water and we sell it at a very cost-effective rate. We have GRDA right around the corner onsite. You know, plenty of power, Google, for example. Google's one of the second largest users of power in the United States, so they like power. And, when you have the cooling towers, what do you have to do? You have to cool it in water. So that's how those industries look at the park. They look at those assets and how they fit. Another asset is our abundant supply of land. You know, we have lots of configurations. We're one of the few parks in the United States that has a contiguous landmass of 1,000 acres. It's called a mega site. So when you come to us and you want a particular acreage, we can configure that however you want - back to the concierge idea - and then we have rail and of course we're in the central U.S. and we're at the crossroads of 412 and 69. I mean, put that into a combination, you're like that's a great place.

>> And I think I was reading in your literature that was sent to us that you can reach almost a quarter of the population within a day because of where you're located.

>> Yes, when you look at Kansas City, Wichita, Dallas, you know, we're in - very close.

>> Do you - do you have employment out of Tulsa? Do you recruit a lot of people out of Tulsa for jobs here?

>> You know, surprisingly, no.

>> It's not that bad of a drive, really.

>> No, it's not and it's a good drive. It's into the sun in the morning and, you know - no, most of our employment is in the rural area when you take a 30-minute radius of here. So we have rural America. I mean, this is what we're all about is getting people jobs that are part of Oklahoma and they want to stay at home. You know, that's another driving force is we want people to grow up in the school system understanding that if they grow up around Pryor, there's a job.

>> How do you guys deal with environmental questions? I mean, I'm sure you get some of that - concerns about manufacturers who would move here. How do you address that issue?

>> Well, we're still subject to environmental regulations. We don't bypass any of those.

>> Because I know small communities, that's some of their biggest issues, you know, is concerns about water or air control, those kinds of things.

>> Yes, we're very knowledgeable about that with our staff. We have an environmental specialist that's fulltime here to help with those issues. And we help work through with state agencies. You know, we're on the radar with the state legislature and if they need help on a particular issue, we can help them. So that's another asset we bring to the table.

>> And the park is also designated as two different - as an enterprise zone and a foreign trade zone, correct? And those are both benefits that people might be looking for with moving their business here. Is that something that you can find in a lot of industrial parks?

>> No. I mean, you can find it, but what we have is a location that covers the entire park, so we can customize that. so that's very unique.

>> Another benefit. Tonya, I have a question for you. you had mentioned before we started the show today that you had been interviewing a very unique young person who had just finished up her program here. Can you tell us a little bit about, first, her and I would like to know a little bit about just how many, in general, what is the - are there are a lot of women out here in the park? You would think, typically, it's all going to be men running around, but apparently not.

>> Yeah, that's true. As I was talking to you before we started the radio show, I had just come in the door from interviewing a young female, 19 years of age, who had just completed welding training and was working here in the park as a welder. So very unique story.

>> That's a very unique story, yeah.

>> Very interesting. Like I said, I do all the fun work. Dave has to do all the, you know ,the paperwork, important things, and I get to do all the fun work. so, yeah, someone told me about her working here in the park and I just thought that's a story that we need to tell. We need to show young women or men that are interested in coming to work. I mean, she makes a great earning, you know, a wage for what she does, 19 years old, as a welder. So very interesting to get to talk to her.

>> And you said she's in kickboxing or, no, not kickboxing. What was it? Martial Arts.

>> Yeah, Martial Arts. She also has her black belt, so she's got a great story to tell and I just called her and said, hey, we would love to tell your story, I think it's a great way to recruit other females to our area. But as you mentioned, we do have a lot of females that come to the park every day and work. it's not just males that work here in the park. So you would be really surprised if we were to take you on a tour and you were to see.

>> That's really awesome. And I think the fact that, you know, she is 19 years old and she's woman, that really speaks well to, you know, the recognition that the park is getting perhaps in the community. You know, you're getting young people in here. You're getting women in here. I think that's really outstanding. I think it probably bodes well for the future of the park and your workforce here.

>> Let's talk about the salaries, kind of dovetailing off of what Tessa was talking about. let's talk about the salary base here and what the average age group is for employment here.

>> Okay. I would say, and Dave may want to help me with this, but we have very competitive wages here in the park. I think that the entry-level positions for or the average wage for most entry-level positions would be around \$15.00-\$16.00 an hour. Most of those positions require a high school diploma or a G.E.D., maybe some type of certification.

>> And of course we've got benefits on top of that because many of these companies have excellent benefits on top of that.

>> That's right. and another thing that we have and a message that we give to our youth is that you don't have to start - you know, you can start there, but you don't have to stop there. A lot of

our employers have tuition reimbursement and they want you to continue your education. So if you're willing to show up, get along with others, and do what they ask, you know, as far as, you know, what makes them profitable, then they will also pay for your continued training. And we have three onsite facilities that offers training here at the park. We have Rogers State University and Northeast Technology Center and then of course Oklahoma Institute of Technology.

>> Yeah, and at a time when kids don't really understand, they think it's unachievable to go to college and get these advanced training degrees and certificates.

>> Or they've got to go somewhere outside of the area.

>> Right. I mean, we're a one-stop shop for a career. I mean, think about that. and these employers are so anxious to get local residents to work that they'll start them at a wage and they have progressive increases, 90-day automatic increases, tuition reimbursement plans. I mean, they'll basically adopt you and take care of you and you can just be right here and have a career.

>> Well, because they're making an investment to keep you and so they're motivating you to - and they're saying, look, we like you, we want to invest in you. if you don't have the training, don't worry about it. we would like to motivate you to grow. Because they're looking for people that can move up the chain, right.

>> Absolutely. And that's one way we look at our businesses. We want to make it a healthy environment and desirable for people to stay. So when we look at our strategic initiatives, we're not only looking at just trying to get the business here; we look at what makes this an attractive place to live, work, play, and enjoy life.

>> And you just said it all right there, growing, you know, settling down, keeping it right here. Keeping those people here where they grew up, can start their own families here, have job security, and clear up to retirement. And so that's awesome. We're talking with David Stewart and Tonya Backward with MidAmerica Industrial Park, Oklahoma's largest industrial park. And I'll tell you, driving to this area, we just, I mean, popped our eyes out of our head because it was like, wow, this is really big. So a lot more to talk about, our last segment when we return on your science radio magazine, *Oklahoma Innovations*.

[Music]

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[Music]

>> Tessa and I are coming to you from Pryor, Oklahoma, at the Midland Industrial Park. It's just a massive, massive area out here of manufacturers and technology companies. MidAmerica Industrial Park, sorry about that. I like your - I like your - David, I like your summary of this. Coordinate, locate, evaluate, educate, and deliver. That's pretty good.

>> Absolutely. That's part of what MidAmerica Delivers is. It's a program that companies can actually grab onto and see tangible results about getting workers, locating them, and getting them plugged into the company. they have to see that. and so the program is branded. We're going to have a local marketing campaign where it's in high schools, it's on TV, and people will understand over the years that MidAmerica's got a job for you.

>> So where's the technology angle on all this? Because I know you have a lot of manufacturers out here, but there's certainly some cool technology companies here. Talk about that.

>> Yeah, the technology is actually integrated into the manufacturing companies, and manufacturing today is not what it used to be. In the old school, you know, you're sitting there just doing one thing all day; that's just not what it's about. it's about electronics, it's robotics, it's all those things that make an automated system work. so that's where it gets fun. That's where the technology comes in. that's where the robotics training and that's where actually the STEM training comes in is that manufacturing requires some knowledge about all that technical work. and that's where we have to get our students is into those programs like you have.

>> So you guys are going to - back to the MidAmerica Career Center. There's going to be a STEM lab within that complex or that building, correct?

>> Right. I mean, when you look at rural America, they really had a difficult time getting access to the kind of programs that metro areas have. So we looked at this and we said, you know, what's a five-year approach to this. We need to get our kids involved in STEM early. So we're going to actually invest in a high-end tech lab that is going to get all of the students in the area bussed in, doing robotics, having contests, having fun, and then they go back to their school. It gets them to MidAmerica, it gets them education, it gets them tied into the businesses at the Career Center, so it's really a one-stop shop to get kids involved.

>> You know, I've got to tell you, I just really love this angle that you guys are taking where you're reaching out into the high school, you know, reaching kids before they sort of have their mind set on where they're going in the future. You're opening up their minds to all the possibilities right here in their hometown and hopefully you're on your way to training some really outstanding young workers.

>> Right, and kind of the sales guy, you know, you have to sell a product to these kids and the product is a great career. So I just think we have to turn into salespeople when we talk to our high school students and actually, you know, educate them about what is out there. And some of that is not happening.

>> Well, some of the kids, when they go through a small - when you think about a small community like Pryor, a lot of kids have aspirations that they want to go to New York and L.A. and all that because social has created that mindset of, oh, I want to go where the action is. What they don't realize is when they get out there how expensive it is and the opportunities aren't like they are right in their home base and many of them do come home.

>> Well, they want to be with their family. I mean, we're Oklahomans; we love our family and we love the country here, the lakes, and the hunting, and fishing, and all that. so I think if we can just tell them about it, they'll be excited.

>> Let's [inaudible] and we'll tag this before we close. I want to give a website where they can, people who are listening to this, because we have a lot of people in the business world and in the education arena who may want to know more about this organization. And it's MAIP.com. That's the website, right? MAIP.com, right?

>> Yes, that's correct.

>> Tell us about the website. What kind of information they'll find there as far as resources, as far as availability of property, or at least the overall capsule of what the website provides.

>> That is true, and one thing that we're working on right now, it's under development, is we want to have one location. So if a person is interested in coming to work in MidAmerica Industrial Park, that they will be able to go to a site and see what's available and how to apply. Regardless of how the employer wants to do their recruitment, at least they can see what is available. And then also match those people up with the different training options that we have here in the park as well.

>> One thing we haven't talked about is your base, Pryor, Oklahoma. Tell us about the community, because this is a nice, nice place.

>> Oh, my gosh. The community - and I've come to know it very well as a result of the collaboration that I had with our advisory council. You know, we had the Chamber of Commerce, we have bankers, we have everybody. And I'm telling you, they are so excited about this. They're onboard, they're giving it 110%, and it's just amazing to see the willingness of people to embrace new ideas and kind of the concepts that we're bringing. Because they want this area to thrive.

>> Sure they do.

>> And apparently it is thriving. You know, we mentioned - Gary mentioned briefly that a lot of times we think that people from small towns like Pryor, they typically when they're getting ready to leave they think, man, I want to go somewhere big. I want to go to New York or I want to go to California.

>> I want to go where the action is. Where it's hip and all that stuff.

>> The big stuff is coming here now. We have Google here in Pryor. Talk a little bit about - were you involved in the recruitment of that or at least the bringing in? How long have they been here?

>> Well, they've been here for, I don't know, five or six years and they actually bought a building that we had and improved it. and then once they found out that it was easy to build, they kept their information confidential, they had plenty of water, plenty of electricity, and so basically corporate decided this is a great place to expand. And now we're one of the top seven sites in the United States.

>> Wow. And what do they do here? What part of Google -

>> That's top secret. Hush. No, they're actually - they have servers there. I think it's where the cloud might be in there.

>> Cool.

>> So we have found the location of the clouds.

>> Only Google knows for sure.

>> So we were talking between segments about an opportunity that a particular student had with Google. He had actually started going through was it a Lego camp when he was young, like elementary school, and has now found himself in a pretty cool job because of that.

>> Sure, yes. We've got so many different ways that we try to promote awareness about the different training providers and jobs that we have available. So we also have a Lego robotics class, a summer camp, at OSUIT and one of the students who had participated, I think he was there, fell in love with it, and continued to go for three or four years. And so we took a picture and I think he was nine years old at the time. We took a picture. He's on the wall when you first walk into OSUIT, but because of that, he remembered that institution and them having training. So after he graduated high school, so he is here from Pryor, Oklahoma, and came back out to OSUIT, saw his picture on the wall, and he says, you know what, I'm meant to be here, right. I just took that as a sign that I was supposed to go to school here. So he went through the training program there and then just recently went to work for Google as a Data Facility Technician. So a hometown guy went to, you know, training right here in the industrial park at OSUIT as a result of the Lego robotics camp in the summers that we offer to our students, and is working for Google.

>> David, we only have a couple of minutes left. We always ask our guests what your vision is, what you see the next five or ten years, and you have such a passion for the development of this complex here. Tell us in your own words how you see this future continuing.

>> Well, the future - you know, we look at it long-term. We're looking at third graders. That tells you how we're looking at the future. So we are building an environment here that is going to be sustainable, is going to be productive, is going to provide people a way to have a good living right where, you know, grow up right where or work where they grew up. And we're going to attract great companies because when companies find out what we have here, they're going to be here. It's just going to take a while for the economy to catch up. So we're going to be ready when it turns and we are going to make this place, I mean, the best place to work and live you can find. And that's our goal.

>> Well, I mean, and you look at what you've done already. And how long - how long is - when you look at the total concept of this complex that you have now, with all of the companies that are here, average timespan that it's taken to flourish?

>> Well, it's flourished since its beginning in 1960 and all the companies moved here originally. There's been somewhat dormant with the recession and then pretty tough economic times. I've been here a little over two years and we're going at a pretty fast pace and we're not going to stop.

>> I was going to say, yeah, because you've got, and you certainly have a great support team here, and of course people like Tonya, who's also passionate about what she does. I know this whole administrative team seems to really love what they're doing here and that's - obviously, they all live here, too, so that's great. What about administrative? How many employed just in this office?

>> Well, in this office we have about ten of us, including my - I have a General Manager, an Environmental and Construction Management Services, and Accounting, and all of those things.

>> And did we talk about the estimated employment base here? Of this -

>> 3,400.

>> 3,400.

>> With jobs always open?

>> Absolutely. If you want a job, come talk to Tonya. She'll get you one.

>> Wow. So no matter where you're living in the state, if you've considered moving or looking for a new career opportunity, you should check out the MidAmerica Industrial Park and all of the opportunities that lay here. And if you do not, don't have the skill training, well, there's opportunities there, too. You guys have been phenomenal. We're glad to be here. I'm surprised we missed this base before now. Thanks to Cornell for bringing us in on this and also thanks to Leah for coming and being on the program as well. We're out of time. We want to thank you and we hope you've learned a lot more about what's going on in northeast Oklahoma in Pryor. Talk to you next time on *Oklahoma Innovations*. Have a good week.

[Music]

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