

AL Whiskey Barrel Plant To Bring 200 Jobs

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Phillip Rawls, Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — The parent company of Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey is expanding in Alabama.

Officials of Brown-Forman joined Gov. Robert Bentley at the Capitol on Thursday to announce the construction of a barrel-making plant in Hillsboro in Lawrence County, about five miles west of Decatur.

Executives with the Louisville, Ky.-based Brown-Forman said it will invest as much as \$60 million in the plant. It's slated to begin production in May 2014 and will have about 200 employees when it reaches full production.

The vice president of Brown-Forman Cooperages, Greg Roshkowski, said the starting wage will be about \$16 an hour.

Legislators representing Lawrence County said they couldn't remember the last time the rural county in northwest Alabama got a plant that created as many jobs. "You've brought hope," Republican Rep. Ken Johnson of Moulton told company executives.

Lawrence County's unemployment rate for April was 7.5 percent, which was slightly higher than the statewide rate of 7.2 percent.

Brown-Forman last year picked Stevenson in northeast Alabama for a mill that cuts the white oak staves for its barrels. It will open in about two weeks with 30 employees. Officials said the staves from Stevenson will be used in the new Lawrence County plant.

Jill Jones, executive vice president of Brown-Forman, said the barrel provides "all the color and a majority of the taste."

She said the company looked at a handful of states and decided to expand in Alabama because state and local officials make it easy to do business.

Bentley said that when a company decides to expand in the state, that's "the best compliment anyone can give Alabama."

The governor, who doesn't drink liquor, said he's never tried Jack Daniel's, but is delighted to get the barrel plant.

"This doesn't mean I'm going to partake of what's in the barrels, but it does mean we are going to make the barrels," he said.

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