WHY GAF CHOSE WICHITA REGION FOR MASSIVE EXPANSION PROJECT

By Emily Barnwell

When North America's largest roofing and waterproofing manufacturer invests more than $350 million into building one of its most advanced facilities to date, it sends a message: this is a region worth betting on.

GAF's decision to establish its new plant in Newton, Kansas, wasn't made lightly. It followed a multistate search and site visits to more than 15 potential locations. Newton stood out. Why? The answer comes down to three core strengths: site readiness, strategic infrastructure and an unmatched community-business partnership.

Site and Business-Ready

From the beginning, GAF's project leaders saw the Newton site as a rare find. It checked all the right boxes: flat terrain, limited environmental hurdles and excellent road infrastructure. Those attributes reduce upfront costs and shorten development timelines. These are critical factors for capital-intensive projects.

Also important was the site's zoning and surrounding land use. It fits well with GAF's operations.

Infrastructure That Powers Growth

Beyond the site itself, the region's robust infrastructure played a pivotal role. The Newton site offers access to major rail lines and highways, essential for a manufacturing operation that moves large volumes of materials.

"When you're sending 200 to 300 trucks in and out of a site every day, your roads need to be up to par," said a GAF executive. "The infrastructure in Newton was already working in our favor."

Utilities and power capacity also met GAF's high demands as a power-intensive business.

The Wichita region understands what manufacturers need and has built the foundation to support them.

A Partnership That Makes the Difference

What truly set the Wichita region apart was the people and their dedication to the partnership with GAF.

The project faced some challenges; however, the public and private sectors in the Newton area didn't waver. Local leaders showed up. They rallied. They put in the work to understand the project and the people behind it.

"When the project hit a rough patch, the community stepped in," said one GAF team member. "The testimonial video local leaders created changed everything internally. It helped get the project back on track."

Elected officials, city staff and economic development leaders also traveled to an existing GAF facility to see operations firsthand. This experience helped them visualize what was coming to Newton and reinforced their commitment to the project.

"We spent a whole day in the facility. People wanted to go in the plant. They talked to the operators. They spoke with the plant's leadership. That made a tremendous difference in the confidence that Newton had and they wanted this large manufacturing facility to be in Newton," shared a GAF executive.

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The Workforce Advantage

The Wichita region's workforce also played a starring role. This community is rooted in manufacturing and agriculture. People know how to work with their hands, understand machinery and take pride in a job well done.

"The fact is, you folks are in the Heartland, and that is very attractive because the work ethic is there," said another GAF leader. "After all the incentives are done. After all the relationships are done, we're all gone, that workforce is what's going to make it the flagship plant, and that's something that you're not going to find everywhere you go."

GAF has already tapped into the region's expertise by partnering with local companies like Prestressed Concrete Construction, LLC and Carl Harris Co., LLC to help build its state-of-the-art manufacturing facility.

With access to both the small-town feel of Newton and the urban amenities of Wichita just 20 minutes away, the region

offers the best of both worlds for talent attraction and retention.

“I get to talk up the value of Wichita, and everybody's like, 'Wichita, okay, Kansas. It's in the middle of nowhere.' Oh, guess what, guys, there's a lot going on!" shared the GAF executive.

Why It Matters

GAF’s investment isn’t just a win for Newton. It’s a signal to other companies: the region is ready. Ready for investment. Ready to build. Ready to partner.

From available sites to regional cooperation and workforce alignment, the greater Wichita region has what it takes to support businesses today and long into the future.

If you're considering where to grow next, take a closer look at south-central Kansas. Like GAF, you might just find exactly what you’re looking for.

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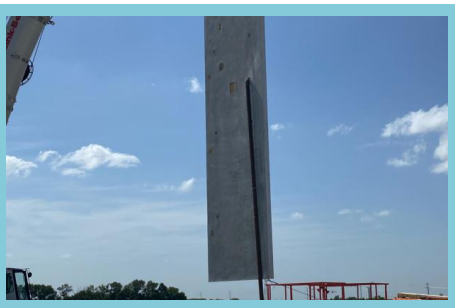
Construction Update

Tuesday, July 22, marked a milestone as the first 10-by-37-foot panel was set for the Newton manufacturing building. Construction is expected to continue through September, with the contractor aiming to erect 10 to 15 panels per day — targeting 30 minutes per panel — and the full structure slated to be under roof by December 2025, weather permitting.