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Former industrial properties in Huntington to receive \$15.7 million for redevelopment into 21st Century manufacturing sites

HUNTINGTON – The Appalachian Climate Technologies (ACT) Now Coalition, of which the City of Huntington is a partner, has been named as one of 20 winners of the U.S. Economic Development Administration’s Build Back Better Regional Challenge, a billion-dollar national competition.

Of the \$62.8 million that is being awarded to the ACT Now Coalition to use for economic revitalization projects throughout Southern West Virginia, \$15.7 million will go toward the redevelopment of two former industrial sites in Huntington into centers for 21st Century manufacturing.

The former American Car and Foundry (ACF) industrial site, which is owned by the Huntington Municipal Development Authority and is now part of the Huntington Brownfields Innovation Zone, or H-BIZ, will receive \$8.2 million to set up a new manufacturing hub. The first anchor tenant of this H-BIZ manufacturing hub will be a new Welding & Robotics Technology Training Center. Marshall University’s Robert C. Byrd Institute (RCBI) will oversee the Training Center in partnership with Mountwest Community and Technical College (MCTC).

Coalfield Development Corp., a nonprofit organization headquartered in Wayne that focuses on rebuilding the Appalachian economy from the ground up, will receive \$7.5 million to partner with Solar Holler and transform the former Black Diamond factory in Huntington’s Westmoreland neighborhood into a new “Mine the Sun” solar training and logistics center.

The ACT Now Coalition is led by Coalfield Development and includes the cities of Huntington, Charleston and Logan; Marshall and West Virginia universities; and several economic revitalization organizations and private-sector innovators. The Coalition’s efforts focus on building a new economy for Southern West Virginia.

“The ACT Now Coalition proves that we are infinitely stronger in West Virginia when we stand together,” Mayor Steve Williams said. “Because Coalfield Development is partnering with our major cities, leading academic institutions, economic revitalization organizations and so many others who are



working for positive change, Southern West Virginia is becoming an economic force that is prepared to compete in the ever-changing world market. We now are proud to say our efforts are bolstered by a partnership with the federal government as we embrace the challenges of the digital age."

Traditionally, Southern West Virginia's economy has been dominated by the coal industry. ACT Now is an opportunity to diversify the region's economy and make it more sustainable. Doing so will help ensure a just transition to a better economy with better-paying jobs and broader community improvement than what has been realized in years past.

ACT Now will transform the struggling Southern West Virginia region with economic investments and job creation in the solar industry, expansion of technology businesses, upgrades of buildings to be more energy efficient, redevelopment of industrial spaces and brownfields for 21st century manufacturing and the transformation of abandoned mine lands into new, sustainable assets.

As an anchor tenant of the H-BIZ manufacturing hub on the former ACF industrial site in Huntington, RCBI's Welding & Robotics Technology Training Center will support the City of Huntington's efforts to grow additional manufacturing job opportunities, said Charlotte Weber, longtime RCBI director and now vice president of Government Relations for Marshall University.

"This state-of-the-art Welding & Robotics Technology Training Center will make training more accessible and provide unbelievable hands-on access to the latest advanced training technologies to meet the needs of area manufacturers, train students for in-demand, good-paying jobs here at home and grow a highly-skilled workforce required to attract new industry to the state," Weber said.

RCBI has a nationally-recognized welding training program that includes direct customized training for manufacturers and a student program in partnership with MCTC. The program, however, does not have a permanent home and is only able to conduct welding training on three evenings per week.

Despite this limitation, in seven years of its existence, RCBI's welding program has produced 230 students who also earned more than 1,100 American Welding Society (AWS) certificates, and the program was recognized by the National Energy Technology Laboratories as an Advanced Welding Workforce Initiative.

A new, dedicated welding training site at the H-BIZ manufacturing hub will allow for a major increase in enrollment, the installation of state-of-the-art training technologies and the ability to run day and evening courses throughout the whole week to meet student and industry demand.

"As owner and developer of the former ACF site, the Huntington Municipal Development Authority (HMDA) considers it a privilege to spearhead the redevelopment of this historical, 150-year-old brownfield property into an environmentally clean industrial and commercial site with modern amenities, said Cathy Burns, executive director of HMDA. "The Build Back Better Regional Challenge



investment will allow existing businesses to retain and add jobs and strengthen partnerships with the renowned training programs of RCBI to expand to meet the growing needs of a transformative workforce.”

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