

Major Industries

From an agriculture and trade-based economy, Brownsville has evolved into a diverse region with a major presence in manufacturing, tourism and retailing.

Manufacturing



The Brownsville/Matamoros area is the manufacturing center of the Rio Grande Valley. More than 150 plants can be found on both sides of the river, employing over 75,000 workers and making every imaginable product.

For thirty years, large-scale manufacturers have been setting up maquiladoras in Matamoros. This includes Fortune 500 giants like Delphi Automotive, Tyco Electronics, and Parker Hannifin.

The automotive industry in particular has concentrated in the area. The list of major OEM suppliers includes: Dana Corp., Invensys PLC, Federal-Mogul Corp., Dura Automotive Systems and Breed Technologies. Other key industries include microelectronics, electrical equipment, medical/dental instruments and household consumer durables.

While the original maquiladora plants were labor-intensive and low on skills, manufacturing on the border has evolved to include some of the most advanced manufacturing technologies available anywhere in the world.

Through the years, Brownsville has changed with the industry. It has become a prime location for suppliers to capture some of the \$2 billion that local manufacturers spend annually on supplies and components.

In recent years, Brownsville has become the ideal location for industrial supplier and service companies. Companies such as T&C Stamping, Exel Plastics, Tella Tool and Unique Molded Products, just to name a few, have set up operations in the community to support large maquiladora clients in the region.

Call Centers

Call centers have recently turned their attention to Brownsville. Cincinnati-based Convergys Corp. opened the city's first call center in August 1999.

Brownsville was selected for the firm's 400-seat customer support center due to the ready availability of workers. Another critical factor in Convergys' decision was the availability of an ideal call center facility - in this case, a vacant department store.

In its three years of operation, Convergys employees have consistently met quality expectations. Convergys remains the only call center in the city, so it draws a young, highly-motivated labor force.

Labor availability for future call centers remains high. The fact that 75% of the labor force speaks both English and Spanish makes this an ideal location for a bilingual operation. For companies seeking former retail sites, there are still vacant buildings on the market.

Retail



The retail industry has emerged as the hottest sector of the Brownsville economy. Retail sales data shows that 2001 was the best year ever for retailing, as sales climbed to \$1.5 billion in the city's stores and restaurants.

This recent activity is being spurred by the expansion of Sunrise Mall. The scale of the mall expansion - 610,000 square feet of premium retail space - is the best indicator of the surging confidence in the area's economy. Dillard's, The Gap, Toy's R Us, Best Buy and Chili's are just some of the newest national retailers to open for business.

The mall's expansion has been the catalyst for other retail developments in the city. Other major retail projects include Paseo de la Resaca, a 1,000-acre master planned community that includes single and multi-family residential developments and prime retail locations.

Sunrise Mall and Paseo de la Resaca are transforming the north end of Brownsville into the retailing center of the city and the region. Banks, specialty stores and others are flocking to service the influx of shoppers from across the Rio Grande Valley and northern Mexico. Good opportunities still exist for more retailers to join the mix.

Tourism



Brownsville is an increasingly popular tourist destination because of its historical attractions, natural wonders and proximity to Mexico and South Padre Island.

Founded in 1848, Brownsville is one of the most historic cities in the nation. The first two battles of the Mexican-American War were fought here. The Palo Alto National Battlefield, now a part of the National Park System, commemorates one of them. The last battle of the Civil War was also fought here at Palmito Ranch almost a month after Robert E. Lee surrendered his Confederate Army in Virginia.

As popular as the old battlefields are the historic buildings that line block-after-block of downtown Brownsville. The Historic Brownsville Museum, Stillman House Museum and the old Fort Brown are popular stops for history buffs. City Hall, built in 1852, is oldest operating city hall in Texas.

The outdoors is another major attraction. Brownsville is a hot spot for bird watching. During the fall and spring migrations, hundreds of species are viewable. Next year, the World Birding Center will open a site on the city's west side.

The Gladys Porter Zoo is one of the top zoos in the country with over 1,500 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish and insects. Nature lovers also make their way to the Sabal Palm Audubon Sanctuary with its intact mature Texas Sabal Palms.

Just to the north is the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, a 45,000-acre preserve on the Laguna Madre with wildlife viewing trails for birds, ocelots, lions, alligators and the endangered jaguarondi.

For those who enjoy the sun and beach, South Padre Island is a must see. Located just 20 minutes from Brownsville, the Island features beautiful, warm beaches, top-notch restaurants and year-round outdoor activities. The Island has become a popular destination for Spring Breakers, Mexican vacationers and Winter Texans. In fact, it is the second most visited tourist destination in Texas. Recreational activities include deep-sea fishing, dolphin watching, parasailing and countless other outdoor pursuits.

Matamoros is another stop on most itineraries. The Juarez Market gives tourists a chance to buy gifts and Mexican souvenirs. The Casa Mata was built in 1845 as a fort to defend Mexico from northern forces. It survived six wars. Today, it houses a museum chronicling Mexico's military history.

Another attraction is the Teatro de la Reforma, Matamoros' old Opera House. The building, constructed in 1860, is the first place the Mexican national anthem was ever played. Ten years ago, the theatre was restored to its original splendor. It now hosts theatrical productions, dance recitals and musical events year round.