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February 9, 2010

Optimism Persists in a Kentucky Town Where a Carmaker Brought Jobs

By [MICKEY MEECE](#)

GEORGETOWN, Ky. — Before [Toyota](#) arrived here more than two decades ago, Georgetown was a sleepy town of 10,000. Its population has since swelled to 25,000, and most of those people owe their livelihood to the sprawling Toyota plant outside of town on Cherry Blossom Way.

People here are eager to see the company's recall problems blow over.

"I think they can get it worked out," said Jeni Gruchow, co-owner of Fava's restaurant in the heart of town.

"It happens to other companies. It's horrible that it's happening to Toyota."

In Georgetown, which is about 15 miles west of Lexington, and other cities where Toyota operates plants in the United States, life is starting to return a bit more to normal this week, as they resume full production after weeklong shutdowns to fix a problem with accelerator pedals.

In interviews, residents here expressed confidence that Toyota would thrive again. The town and the automaker are inextricably linked — the first Camry rolled off the line in 1988 — so it is of course in everyone's interest to see Toyota out of the headlines.

"Toyota's past will take care of its future," said George Lusby, the county judge executive who holds the top administrative post in the county.

The mayor, Karen Tingle-Sames, was just as optimistic. "Really, the community has a lot of confidence in Toyota, that they will be able to work through and fix everything they need to fix and get on top of everything," she said.

Just down the street from Fava's, Jason D. Mays, a regular at the Lock and Key Cafe, drained his mug of coffee and speculated about the muted response here to Toyota's woes.

"In my honest opinion," he said, "I do not think it's as important to people as the Friday night Scott County game or the Saturday Georgetown College basketball game because they have enough faith in that behemoth of a plant three miles down the road, they are really not worried about it."

Perhaps residents were heeding the editorial last Thursday of the local newspaper, the Georgetown News-Graphic.

"Rest easy, Toyota is on the job," the headline said. Mike Scogin, the publisher, said he wrote it to encourage everyone to take a deep breath because he felt "there was a little bit of piling on going on."

Toyota's reputation was not earned overnight, he wrote, nor was it "bestowed because the company is reckless."

"In many parts of the country, Toyota is a brand," the editorial added. "But to those of us here in Georgetown and in Kentucky, we know Toyota because we are Toyota. Our friends, neighbors and family members manufacture the cars in question."

For more than a week, Mr. Scogin said, Toyota news has dominated the front page of the newspaper, which is published three times a week. By Saturday, coverage of the murder of a former school bus driver was the top story.

There is hope here that the full-court press on Toyota will peter out. As Doug C. Smith, a regular at Fava's, said on Friday: "This, too, shall pass."

But the coverage is likely to continue with a House committee scheduled to hold hearings on Wednesday about Toyota's handling of the recalls.

If the tone is anything like the remarks of [Ray LaHood](#), the transportation secretary, who last week briefly advised Toyota owners to stop driving their cars, confidence here may give way to anger.

"Why is this different than any other recall?" asked Jack Conner, executive director of the local chamber of commerce. "Why the magnitude of this concern, when this is something that happens in the business a lot?"

[Ford](#), [General Motors](#) and others have had problems over the years without the national media attacking them, added Mr. Lusby, the judge executive.

Meanwhile, not even the beloved Kentucky Wildcats provided total escape from the sting of Toyota criticism.

During a game Saturday afternoon, the announcer praised Kentucky's standout guard, John Wall, by comparing him to a Toyota: "He hits the acceleration, then slams on the brakes," he said, then added "Even better than Toyota. The brakes work, so does the acceleration."

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: February 10, 2010

The continuation of an article on Tuesday about the reaction of Georgetown, Ky., the home of a major Toyota plant, to the carmaker's recent troubles reversed the second and third columns of type in some editions. A corrected version can be found at nytimes.com/business.

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