

## BlueOval SK workers to vote on unionization this month, NLRB says

BY ADAAH HUFANA  
FOR THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE

Full and part-time production and maintenance employees of BlueOval SK Battery Park will vote this month on whether to unionize with the United Auto Workers.

The National Labor Relations Board announced last week that an election will take place Aug. 26 and 27 before and after the workday at the Glendale battery manufacturer for electric vehicles.

“BlueOval SK workers will soon have the chance to determine if they want to continue to speak for themselves or hand that right over to a labor union,” BlueOval SK Senior Communications Manager Malloreay Cooke said in a statement. “Our team members have endured months of union sales tactics and slanders against their exciting jobs and proud accomplishments. They are ready for their voices to be heard.”

BlueOval SK is owned by the Ford Motor Co. and SK

On in a 50-50 joint venture. Construction on the first of what was two planned battery plants began in December 2022 and workers began to be hired for it in 2023.

The planned dual battery plants were to be called Kentucky 1 and Kentucky 2. While Kentucky 2 still is being constructed, it is unclear when it will begin producing batteries as it was announced last year to delay production. Kentucky 1 is set to begin production in 2025, according to the BlueOval website.

The election comes about seven months after a supermajority of employees filed for a union election in January 2025, according to the NLRB.

The road towards an election has been a complicated one ever since the beginning of the year. Michael Adams, CEO of BlueOval SK, said in an op-ed piece in the *Courier Journal* in February that the effort to unionize was “premature” because not all of the employees had been hired yet.

Since January, the union

election has been delayed because of investigating unfair labor charges and requests to put the election on hold.

According to WKYU, the BlueOval employees requested to vote to unionize because of worries about health hazards and workplace safety.

In an investigation by the *Courier Journal*, a review of health and safety complaints and state investigations found “dozens of workplace injuries; hospitalizations related to respiratory issues; unshakeable mold contamination; a bat-infested training facility; blocked emergency exit doors and chemical exposure risks.”

A report from the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy said the auto industry now is a significant part of the state’s economy, and unionization could help get auto workers higher wages and create higher economic output for the state overall.

Eric Dixon, senior researcher for the Ohio River Valley Institute, a nonprofit research organization that supports job growth and clean energy in Appalachia and

surrounding regions, said in a report that BlueOval SK ran a campaign to discourage employees from unionizing while the election was being delayed.

The report said the campaign involved running anti-union advertisements, holding captive audience meetings, threatening to close the plant and hiring consultants to avoid a union.

“Ford’s strategy to build out the future of EVs can not only help our kids breathe cleaner air, it has the potential to revive communities that have endured economic stagnation for far too long,” Dixon said. “But EV jobs must be good jobs, with fair pay and protections. Otherwise, we risk perpetuating a cycle of chasing economic growth for its own sake — rather than for its ability to provide Kentuckians with real livelihoods.”

Cooke said in the statement the company welcomes the election.

“We celebrate and empower each person to define their own success at BlueOval SK,” Cooke said in the statement.

## Area code overlay coming for 502 region

BY PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

A new area code will be added in northcentral Kentucky, joining the current 502 area code to ensure enough phone numbers remain available for residents and businesses.

The Kentucky Public Service Commission announced approval of an all-services distributed overlay for the 502 service region. The change will allow current customers to keep their phone numbers and the 502 area code, but all local calls eventually will require dialing the full 10-digit

number.

That is the same system in use for the 270 area code, which also is served by the 364 area code which was introduced in 2014. The entire state began as 502 when area codes were introduced by AT&T in 1947.

The need for a new area code became apparent when the North American Numbering Plan Administrator projected that the current supply of numbers in the 502 area would be exhausted by the third quarter of 2027. NANPA filed for relief with the PSC on Oct. 14, 2024, leading to the current plan.

The PSC release said the new area code, which has not yet been assigned, will cover the same geographic region as the 502 area code. Created in 1947 as one of the original area codes, the 502 code now serves northcentral Kentucky, including Louisville and Frankfort.

Implementation of the new area code will follow a 13-month rollout schedule. Network preparation is set to begin June 1, 2026. A permissive dialing period — where calls can be made using either seven or ten digits — will begin Dec. 7, 2026. Mandatory ten-digit dialing will start

on June 7, 2027, and the first numbers with the new area code could be issued as early as July 5, 2027.

The PSC will announce the new area code once it is assigned by NANPA, the release said.

The full order, a video of public hearings, and additional records related to the case are available at psc.ky.gov, under case number 2024-00333.

The Kentucky PSC is an independent agency attached for administrative purposes to the Energy and Environment Cabinet. It oversees more than 1,100 utility providers across the state.

## AIRT at ECTC addresses needs of evolving industrial workforce

As Kentucky’s manufacturing sector continues to evolve with new electrical, mechanical and automation systems, academic programming at Elizabethtown Community and Technical College is evolving along with it.

We at ECTC are excited to launch a new advanced manufacturing academic program known as Automation, Industrial and Robotics Technology to deliver high-quality education that fuels regional economic development. This program signals a strategic shift to prepare students for the increasing use of robotics and automation in today’s industrial workspaces.

The AIRT program evolved from three existing programs, including Engineering and Electronics Technology, Industrial Maintenance Technology and most tracks of the Electrical Technology program, combining them into one streamlined, employer-driven curriculum. ECTC will continue to offer the Electrical Technology program’s electrical construction track for aspiring residential and commercial electricians.

Advisory boards from each of the original programs, made up of local employers, collaborated through joint reviews to shape the new curriculum, focusing on the skills students need to succeed in today’s job market. Through the new program, students can choose from

five career-focused tracks: Instrumentation and Process Control, Automation and Robotics, Electronics Automation, Manufacturing Maintenance and Mechatronics.

The collaboration didn’t stop with local industry. This program also is bolstered by a partnership between the ECTC Robbins University Center and the University of Louisville’s J.B. Speed School of Engineering, which is allowing students in the program’s Mechatronics track to seamlessly transfer to complete a bachelor’s degree in applied engineering at U of L. And the best part is that students don’t have to leave Hardin County to earn that four-year degree.

U of L will offer classes at the ECTC BlueOval SK Training Center in Glendale, a significant benefit for working students and employers alike. Applied engineering programming is crucial for today’s workforce, as it fills the space between two-year technical programs and four-year engineering degrees, focusing on real-world problem solving and industry-specific skills.

Graduates in the AIRT program won’t just walk away with an associate degree, they’ll earn stackable credentials along the way. In fact, many students will complete short-term certificates in their first semester, giving them a jumpstart

into high-paying and high-demand jobs before graduation.

Students in the program are supported by the Advanced Manufacturing Accelerator Project, which builds a talent pipeline starting in middle school, and continuing through high school, ECTC, internships and ultimately employment in advanced manufacturing.

Classes for the fall semester begin Aug. 18, and while the AIRT program is not yet eligible for the Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship, we anticipate that designation soon. In the meantime, new students are encouraged to meet with their advisor to map out their best path forward.

Whether students are looking to enter the workforce with an associate degree or pursue a bachelor’s degree, the AIRT program will better prepare them for success in automation, robotics and manufacturing careers, which are becoming more and more crucial in the Lincoln Trail workforce and beyond. This program is a reflection of what our incredible faculty believe technical education should be: responsive, hands-on, and built upon strong regional partnerships.

For more information about ECTC programs, visit ectc.us/airt or call 270-769-2371.

Dr. Telly Sellars serves as vice president of academic affairs at Elizabethtown Community and Technical College and as a member of the Lincoln Trail Workforce Development Board. He can be reached at telly.sellars@kctcs.edu.

### MARKET WATCH: TUESDAY

#### US STOCKS SLIP ON WEAK ECONOMIC SIGNAL

NEW YORK — U.S. stock indexes slipped on Tuesday following the latest discouraging signal on the U.S. economy.

The S&P 500 fell 0.5%, coming off a whipsaw stretch where it went from its worst day since May to its best since May. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 61 points, or 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite fell 0.7%.

A weaker-than-expected report on activity for U.S. businesses in services industries like transportation and retail added to worries that President Donald Trump’s tariffs may be hurting the economy. But increased hopes for coming cuts to interest rates by the Federal Reserve, along with a stream of stronger-than-expected profit reports from U.S. companies, helped to keep the losses in check. The S&P 500 remains within 1.4% of its record.

Edgewell Personal Care, the company behind the Schick, Playtex and Banana Boat brands, fell 18.8% after reporting lower profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. CEO Rod Little said it was a very weak season for sun care in North America, while tariffs are acting as a drag on profits.

All kinds of companies have been telling investors how much they expect tariffs to shave off their earnings this year, and trade policy was one of the most common topics U.S. services businesses talked about in the latest monthly survey compiled by the Institute for Supply Management about their activity.

“Tariffs are causing additional costs as we continue to purchase equipment and supplies,” one com-

pany in the health care and social assistance business said, for example. “Though we need to continue with these purchases, the cost is significant enough that we are postponing other projects to accommodate these cost changes.”

Another business in the real estate, rental and leasing industry told the institute that economic “uncertainty remains the dominant theme. However, the tariff talk has turned out to be much more bluster than actual policy, and businesses have seemed to tune out the noise.”

The threat of tariffs isn’t seeming to slow the juggernaut of investment flowing into artificial-intelligence technology.

Palantir Technologies rose 7.8% after the AI-platform provider reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The AI darling also raised its forecast for revenue over the full year, and its stock climbed further after it had already doubled for the year so far coming into the day.

“We continue to see the astonishing impact of AI leverage,” CEO Alex Karp said.

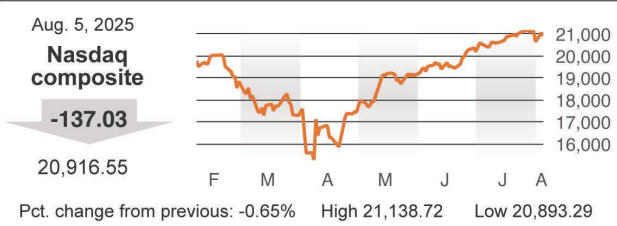
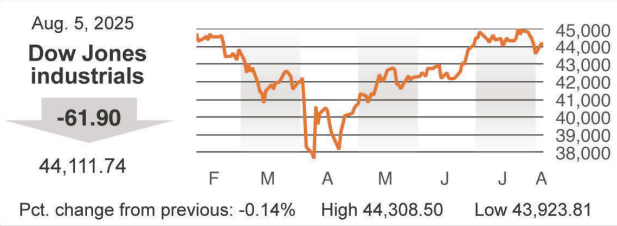
Axon Enterprise leaped 16.4% after the company, which sells Tasers, body cameras and software to public safety departments, reported a much stronger profit than analysts expected. It also cited growth in its AI offerings, which can save time for transcriptions and other tasks, and raised its forecast for revenue this year.

On the losing side of Wall Street was American Eagle Outfitters, which dropped 9.5% to give back some of its 23.6% jump from the day before. That’s when Trump weighed in on the debate surrounding the retailer’s advertisements, which highlight actor Sydney Sweeney’s great jeans.

### LOCAL STOCKS

Prices of local stocks at the close of trading Tuesday:  
Cardinal Health (CAH); \$158.24;-\$0.38;2.3M;96.05-168.44  
Churchill Downs (CHDN); \$103.44;-\$1.07;500K;85.58-150.21  
DuPont de Nemours (DD); \$72.60;\$1.69;9.5M;53.77-90.06  
Ford Motor Co. (F); \$11.06;\$0.11;59M;8.44-11.97  
General Electric (GE); \$272.12;-\$4.11;4M;159.36-276.85  
Humana Inc. (HUM); \$254.47;\$7.12;1.9M;206.87-382.72  
PNC Fin. Svcs. (PNC); \$188.99;-\$0.08;1.5M;145.12-216.26  
Papa John’s (PZZA); \$40.17;-\$0.09;1.3M;30.16-60.75  
United Parcel Service (UPS); \$86.78;\$1.76;9.5M;84.28-145.01  
Verizon Comms (VZ); \$42.67;-\$0.28;15M;37.59-47.35  
Walmart Stores (WMT); \$99.31;-\$0.28;18M;66.67-105.30  
WesBanco Inc. (WSBC); \$29.76;-\$0.06;500K;26.42-37.36  
Yum! Brands (YUM); \$139.50;-\$7.50;5.1M;122.13-163.30

### A DAY ON WALL STREET



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