

Stillwater, OK Anticipates Mercury Marine's Exit From WI

Murray Evans, Associated Press Writer

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Officials in Stillwater said Monday they're happy to hear boat engine maker Mercury Marine could be moving hundreds of jobs to their city, even if they sympathize with a Wisconsin city that may be losing those jobs.

Mercury Marine said Sunday it intends to move the jobs to Stillwater after a union rejected a contract proposal that would have kept the jobs at the company's Fond du Lac, Wis., plant. The company wanted to consolidate operations in one of the two towns.

Josh McKim, the executive director of economic development for the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce, said it's been difficult for local officials as they waited for the company's decision, knowing that Stillwater could have lost about 385 jobs if the company had decided in favor of Fond du Lac.

"We were on pins and needles all last week, waiting on not just the company but the union in Fond du Lac to see what their actions would be," McKim said. Stillwater has a nonunion plant.

McKim said Stillwater officials have been working with the company — one of the town's largest private-sector employers — for about a year and that while details remain that must be worked out, "there is definitely a big sense of relief." He said he sympathizes with Fond du Lac officials, but that he believes Stillwater is the best location for the company long-term.

"Of course, Fond du Lac thinks the same thing," he said.

The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers Local 1947 in Fond du Lac rejected the contract proposal in an Aug. 23 vote. Mercury Marine said the proposal was its "best and final" offer.

It said the deal did not involve pay cuts, but the union said workers were asked to give up 2 percent raises in each of the last two years of their current contract. The concessions also called for lower wages for new hires and workers called back from layoffs and changes in work rules and pension benefits.

The union, which represents about 850 workers at Mercury Marine, scrapped plans Sunday for a last-minute, second vote on a new contract after the company said it wouldn't honor ballots cast after midnight Saturday.

The company issued a statement at early Sunday saying it will continue to operate the Fond du Lac plant under the terms of the existing contract, which expires in

Stillwater, OK Anticipates Mercury Marine's Exit From WI

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

2012. But it also said it would begin planning to move jobs from Fond du Lac to Stillwater.

"This has been a very difficult and stressful time for all involved but, as we said at the beginning of this process, it is our responsibility to make the best business decisions for the company to have a sustainable future," Mercury Marine President Mark Schwabero said in the statement.

Union leaders said they have no new ideas for reviving talks to keep 850 manufacturing jobs in Fond du Lac. Dan Longsine, the union's chief negotiator, said the company is no longer interested in talking. Russell Krings of the union's district office said the company told the union the deadline for talking has passed.

Steve Fleming, a Mercury Marine spokesman in Fond du Lac, said the final decision on the future of the manufacturing jobs has been made.

"From our perspective, it is time for everybody to move on," Fleming said. "We are equally as comfortable going to Oklahoma as we are staying in Fond du Lac."

Mercury Marine, founded in 1939 as Kiekhaefer Corp. of Cedarburg, Wis., also has manufacturing operations in Tulsa, South Carolina, Florida, Mexico, Japan, United Kingdom, Belgium and China. It is a subsidiary of Lake Forest, Ill.-based Brunswick Corp.

U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas, R-Okla., whose district includes Stillwater, praised the efforts of local and state officials.

"Their hard work has resulted in a new, valuable asset for the city of Stillwater and the entire state of Oklahoma," he said.

U.S. Rep. Tom Petri, R-Wis., whose district includes Fond du Lac, said he was "deeply dismayed" no agreement was reached between the company and union. "We must now urgently continue to focus on what can be done to keep Mercury's corporate headquarters in Fond du Lac," he said in a statement.

Mercury Marine has said its 1,000 corporate jobs were also at risk of leaving town, but no decision has been made.

—

Associated Press Writer Robert Imrie in Wausau, Wis., contributed to this report.

Source URL (retrieved on 09/18/2014 - 3:57am):

<http://www.impomag.com/news/2009/08/stillwater-ok-anticipates-mercury-marines-exit-wi>