Kia To Hire 700 Georgians For Optima Production

Kate Brumback, Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Kia Motors announced plans Thursday to begin manufacturing the Optima midsize sedan at itsplant in Georgia, a move expected to add about 700 jobs at the complex.

Production on the 2012 Optima is set to begin in the third quarter of this year, Kia Motors said. The plant in West Point currently employs about 2,300 people and the work force is expected to grow to nearly 3,000 by year's end, according to the company.

"Kia is experiencing tremendous growth in the U.S., and the increased volume at (the Georgia plant) will create more jobs at the plant as well as nearby and on-site suppliers and is the latest demonstration of our unwavering commitment to the U.S. and local economies," Kia Motors America and Kia Motors Manufacturing Georgia president Byung Mo Ahn said in a statement.

West Point Mayor Drew Ferguson said he was thrilled by the development.

"The investment that we had made in the automotive industry is paying the dividends we hoped it would," he said.

Kia Motors America set an all-time annual sales record last year and reported the best monthly and quarterly sales results in its history in March, the company said.

The Optima is currently produced in South Korea. The Georgia plant will produce Optimas destined for North American markets.

The plant in West Point, near the Alabama state line, is the first North American manufacturing site for the South Korean company. It began mass production of the Sorento crossover utility vehicle in November 2009.

The plant produced 125,000 Sorentos in 2010, representing about a third of the total sales for Kia Motors America last year. At full capacity, the plant will be able to assemble 300,000 vehicles a year.

Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal applauded the announcement.

"The company's decision to produce one of its newest models in West Point reflects the success it has already experienced here thanks to the talent and commitment of its workforce," Deal said in a statement. "This is a great win for Georgia and yet another tribute to the strength of our business environment and infrastructure."

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