

Bobcat Returns Some Work To Closed Bismarck Plant

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Bobcat Co. plans to bring back some production to its shuttered Bismarck factory through the hiring of 35 workers by a logistics company that assembles machines, officials said.

The Bismarck Tribune reported Thursday that Menlo Worldwide Logistics will use part of the 463,000-square-foot production plant that Bobcat closed in December 2009, putting some 500 employees out of work.

Bobcat spokeswoman Laura Ness Owens said the announcement should not be taken as a return of Bobcat's manufacturing presence in Bismarck. The plant is still for sale, and its price is listed by a real estate broker at \$8.3 million.

Menlo has 120 employees doing component logistics work and supply chain management in Bismarck. The 35 new positions will be an extension of Menlo's work and workers will perform pre-production machining, subassembly and delivery services, the company said.

Ness Owens said Bobcat chose to expand Menlo's work in Bismarck to ease demands on production at the Bobcat factory in Gwinner.

Tom Ricker, president of United Steel Workers Local 560 representing Bobcat workers in Gwinner, criticized the move and said it was a way to undercut workers and bring back production at lower wages than Bismarck workers earned before they were laid off.

"I'm disgusted with it," he said. "I think it's a slap in the face to the former workers in Bismarck."

Ricker said the new positions will receive lower wages than the former Bobcat employees got. Ness Owens said that wage information needed to come from Menlo, which did not immediately respond to telephone calls for comment.

Gov. Jack Dalrymple released a statement praising the announcement of the additional workers.

"This is good news for the Bismarck-Mandan area and another example of the diversified economic growth we are experiencing throughout North Dakota," Dalrymple said.

Ness Owens said the factory will require some work to get it ready for production again. She said that Bobcat also would consider other options for the remaining

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space in the factory, including leasing to other companies, if a buyer can't be found.

"There are a lot of factories on the market, unfortunately," she said.

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