AR Joist Facility Completes $4M Upgrade

HOPE, Ark. (AP) — A manufacturer has reopened a factory in Hope and announced Monday it plans to hire as many as 178 workers now that a $4 million upgrade is complete.

New Millennium Building Systems, which makes steel joists at the plant, has hired 58 workers and said it plans to hire up to 120 more.

The company bought three factories, including the one in Hope, after Commercial Metals Corp. decided to get out of the joist business and put the plants up for sale.

The jobs are important in Hempstead County, where the unemployment rate is about 9 percent and 27 percent of the population lives in poverty, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"We look forward to becoming a productive part of the Hope community," plant general manager Chris Graham said. "We've been welcomed with open arms. We'll strive to be a positive part our employees' lives and of our community for years to come."

When fully staffed, the plant will have an $8 million annual payroll.

Gov. Mike Beebe, who has worked to bring high-tech jobs to Arkansas, has also stressed that the state should be home to manufacturing, even though the number of manufacturing jobs has dwindled in recent years.

"Arkansas will not cede manufacturing to any part of the world. We want to keep it in America and keep it here in our state," Beebe said. "The arrival of New Millennium in Hope brings good jobs in tough economic times, and breathes new life into existing infrastructure. It's a good formula for success all around."

The parent company of New Millennium — Fort Wayne, Ind.-based Steel Dynamics Inc. — bought the factories in Hope, Fallon, Nev., and Juarez, Mexico, in September 2010 for a combined $17 million.

The company said at the time it would cost between $20 million and $25 million to build and outfit only one new joist plant.

Hope Mayor Dennis Ramsey said the city has a decades-long history of producing joists, which are used as building supports.

"We are excited that is continuing with New Millennium and the jobs they are bringing. Their investment and job creation will be most beneficial to a growing of southwest Arkansas economy," Ramsey said.

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