

GM Brings Jobs To MO

Jim Salter, Associated Press

WENTZVILLE, Mo. (AP) — Missouri's once robust auto industry is making a comeback, with more good news Thursday: General Motors Co. will add pickup trucks to its line of products made in Wentzville, creating more than 1,200 new jobs.

The announcement by GM Vice President of Labor Relations Cathy Clegg came two weeks after Ford announced it was adding 1,600 jobs to build transit vans at its Claycomo plant in Kansas City.

In Wentzville, a town about 40 miles west of St. Louis, the news was met with loud cheers from hundreds of autoworkers who took a pause from work to hear the announcement inside the sprawling plant on the day Chevrolet celebrated its 100th birthday.

"More than anything, this investment represents a vote of confidence in the plant in Wentzville," Clegg said.

GM plans to add 500,000 sq. feet of space as part of a \$380 million investment in the Wentzville plant that currently makes Chevrolet Express and GMC Savana full-size vans. Tax incentives from the city and the state helped spur the investment, though the total value of those incentives wasn't immediately available.

The announcement represents a strong turnaround for GM in Wentzville. Just two years ago, GM was fighting through bankruptcy and shut down a second shift at the plant.

Now, the company is calling back the second-shift workers, resulting in 400 jobs that will start in January. Meanwhile, production of the Chevrolet Colorado midsize pickup will mean 1,260 new jobs. The plant currently has about 1,400 workers. The average autoworker in Wentzville earns \$28 per hour.

"These new products will provide an opportunity for the plant to be more fully utilized and provide good-paying, middle-class jobs for Wentzville," said Joe Ashton, the United Auto Workers vice president representing the GM department.

Missouri once ranked just behind Michigan in the number of autoworkers and plants. Just a decade ago, the St. Louis area was home to four — the GM plant in Wentzville, a Ford plant in Hazelwood that made the Explorer sport utility vehicle, and two Chrysler plants in Fenton that made minivans and pickup trucks.

But Ford closed the Hazelwood plant in 2006 and Daimler Chrysler shut down its Fenton plants in 2008 and 2009, leaving thousands of autoworkers without jobs, along with thousands of employees of supplier businesses.

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Gov. Jay Nixon said Missouri is well-positioned to once again become a key player in the industry. He said the expansions in Kansas City and Wentzville will likely lead to additional jobs for suppliers providing parts for those plants.

"Today we're here to celebrate the future of the American auto industry, and my friends, the future is bright," he said.

The Colorado's future in the U.S. had been in doubt since 2009, when GM announced plans to close the factory in Shreveport, La., where it is currently made. The truck that will be built in Wentzville will be the next generation of the Colorado. GM said it should appeal to U.S. buyers because of its design, capabilities and fuel efficiency.

The company hasn't said when the new generation truck will go on sale in the U.S. or how much it will cost. GM is preparing to sell the latest version of the Colorado in Thailand, then in other regions of the world. Engineers in other markets will tailor the truck to the needs of their region, the company said.

In Thailand, the truck will be powered by gasoline and diesel engines, but GM wouldn't say what engines the truck will get in the U.S.

Ford will make the North American version of its popular European commercial Transit van in Kansas City and hopes to be doing so by 2013. Ford plans to spend \$1.1 billion on upgrading Claycomo, including the addition of a new stamping plant and a second line for the F-150 pickup.

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