

GE Adds To Work Force At Louisville Plant

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Bruce Schreiner, Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — General Electric Co. said Wednesday it will add 380 more workers this summer as the company ramps up production of a new line of refrigerators, part of a planned \$800 million investment in its Louisville operations by 2014.

The new employment comes on top of about 1,000 production jobs already added at GE's sprawling Appliance Park operations in Louisville in the first half of the year, mostly to produce new bottom freezer refrigerators and a new water heater.

The newest 380 employees will man a new second shift to produce the refrigerators. The company is still hiring those workers, who will start at \$13.01 an hour plus benefits, spokeswoman Kim Freeman said.

GE is sifting through 16,000 applications it took earlier this year and will not take additional requests for the jobs, she said.

The company is ramping up production in hopes of tapping into the growing popularity of bottom freezer refrigerators. The refrigerators started reaching retail floors in the last two weeks.

"We are adding additional production capacity to ensure we can meet the demand," said Paul Surowiec, refrigeration product general manager at GE Appliances.

Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer said the production growth will spin off job growth for local suppliers.

"The growth of GE's manufacturing operation at Appliance Park and the ripple effect on our community continues to validate the city and state governments' decisions to encourage GE to choose Louisville when GE was deciding where to invest," he said. "We couldn't be more thrilled with their progress."

GE was awarded \$37 million in state and local incentives related to its \$800 million investment in Appliance Park. The company said those incentives are largely dependent on hiring. The company also was awarded federal investment tax credits totaling \$24.8 million.

Appliance Park now employs about 5,000, down from a peak of nearly 23,000 in the early 1970s.

Vice President Joe Biden visited Appliance Park two years ago to tout the plans for increased production and employment. He gave some of the credit to the tax breaks offered under the federal stimulus program to spur investment and job creation.

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In February, GE began producing a hybrid water heater at Appliance Park.

GE also says preparations are under way to open another plant at Appliance Park to make front load washing machines and matching dryers in early 2013. GE has said it expects to create hundreds of new jobs from introducing new laundry products within the next year, including investments in its top load washers.

Overall, GE plans to make \$1 billion in investments by 2014 to upgrade lines of products already made in the U.S. and create new factories for products not previously made in the U.S. While Louisville operations will get the lion's share of the new investment, the company said it will also make upgrades in side-by-side refrigerators made in Bloomington, Ind., and cooking products made in Lafayette, Ga.

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