

Gun Makers To Expand, Add Jobs In AR

The Associated Press

FORT SMITH, Ark. (AP) — Two firearms companies owned by a German group said Thursday they would spend \$7 million on manufacturing plants at a former military installation near Fort Smith and create from 70 to 120 jobs in the next five years.

Umarex USA already has offices at the Chaffee Crossing center and will share a campus with Walther Arms on the east side of town, where the U.S. Army formerly operated Fort Chaffee. Both companies are owned by the PW Group.

"Fort Smith's excellent workforce helped convince Umarex and Walther to increase production here, and their overall Arkansas experience led (them) to make our state their North American headquarters," Gov. Mike Beebe said.

Umarex and Walther said they would move the manufacturing of certain products from overseas to the Fort Smith plant.

Umarex has made air guns for nearly four decades and entered the firearms market in 2008, when it began to import a Colt .22-caliber weapon. It also makes paintball products and blank-firing pistols. Walther has been in business 126 years and makes firearms from .22-caliber to .40-caliber.

Adam Blalock, the chief executive officer for both companies, said it looked forward to growing both companies in Arkansas.

"My personal hope and objective is to see more manufacturing and jobs return to the USA in the coming years and what better place than Fort Smith," he said.

Fort Chaffee, a World War II-era military installation, housed Cuban refugees after the Mariel boatlift in 1980 and New Orleans refugees following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. It also was where Elvis Presley had his famous haircut after joining the military in 1958.

A portion of the old fort, including the Chaffee Crossing area, has been gradually converted to public use since it was ordered closed during military reductions in 1997.

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